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[VALENTINE APPROACHED THE SLUMBERER WITH CAUTIOUS TREAD.]

FIRES UNSEEN.

CHAPTER I.

UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE.

THE leafy days of June had come, the most beautiful in all the year, and had come with a burst of heat and radiance which had never been exceeded, even beneath the glowing southern skies of bright Castile.

A horseman who had been riding for many hours along the unsheltered high road now turned gratefully into the forest, which would be his destination.

The forest was dense, but in one place there was a clearly-defined path between gigantic trees, whose interlacing boughs formed a cool green canopy keenly appreciated by the traveller, whose brows throbbed fiercely from his long exposure to the scorching rays of the sun.

This solitary equestrian was an Englishman by birth; but, as his hair and colouring betokened, there was a strong admixture of

Spanish blood in his veins; that he was brave, nobly-born, rich, unhappy, his equipments and mien implied.

His face had no principal source of attraction, no prominent feature, for all were perfect, from the deep dark grey eyes that spoke of noble instincts and haughty pride mingled with Southern passion, to the chin, which terminated a perfect oval, and which, without being in the least indicative of weakness or effeminacy, would not have been too heavy for a woman's face.

Two lines between the jetty eyebrows and a downward curve of the finely-formed mouth betokened two salient points of Valentine Eyre's character. Firstly, that he was intensely melancholy; secondly, that a deep-rooted cynicism, whether real or acquired, was his prevailing mood.

As far as the costume of an English gentleman can indicate his position, Valentine's attire at once, faultless and negligent, betokened him a man belonging to the upper ranks of society; but it was his horse which he bestrode that gave chief evidence of his wealth.

It would not have required a judge of equine points to decide that there was the worth of hundreds of guineas in that noble steed "Who looked as if the speed of thought were in his limbs."

But Valentine would not have parted with the Don for his weight in gold. The eccentric, unsociable Englishman had through two years made a friend and companion of this horse, which in one of his wild and daring adventures he had captured on the plains of Tartary.

They had penetrated the heart of the cool green forest, and Valentine, whose thoughts were in the past, was taking no heed of the way, when suddenly the Don paused, and while his rider felt him tremble beneath his weight, raised his noble head, neighing long and loudly, and breathing hard through velvet nostrils, pawed the ground impatiently.

"What is it?" murmured Valentine in soothing tones. "What is it, my good Don?" he repeated, patting the glossy neck of the animal, who, strange to say, seemed in no wise soothed by his master's tones.

"What does it mean?" muttered Valen-

time, but with no fear for his personal safety, for the foliage which he carried in his belt were fully armed and loaded, then peering through the trees he caught at some distance the glimpses of a fire and moving figures, and at once decided that he was in the neighbourhood of a gipsy encampment.

Again Valentine patted the neck of his steed, who went on a few eager paces and then stopped short again, neighing more loudly than before, and as the awakened forest echoes died away another steed responded from the distance to the Don's call.

"The horse knows that he is near one of his own kindred," said a sweet voice in a strange tongue, a mixture of Spanish and Romany, and curbing his impatient steed with a firm hand, Valentine turned his wondering eyes in the direction from which the sounds had proceeded.

There, on his left, in the cool shadow of chestnut boughs, Valentine saw a vision before him whose unparalleled loveliness his heart for a moment felt faint with awe and wonder.

The form, which seemed too beautiful for mortal world, was that of a young girl who might have been any age from twelve to seventeen. There she stood like a nymph of the forest, her brown and shapely limbs contrasting well with the crimson garment which barely reached beyond her knees. Her countenance was a perfect oval, with a complexion which represented the clear hue of the olive; there was no red, but in the full and delicately formed lips, which, being slightly parted, revealed two tiny rows of teeth that sparkled like priceless diamonds in the sun's rays. The orbs that lay in the shadow of silken jolly fringes were black as night, but they were more than that—

"They were so soft, so beautiful and rife,
The very air seemed lighter for these eyes."

Like living amber and like an open silk were the tresses which waved in lavish abundance over the girl's bare shoulders and arms, until Valentine felt almost angry, because the beautiful profusion would have hidden from his sight the little brown hands beside which even Psyche's own must have seemed coarse and unsightly.

He could think of nothing which would offer comparison to the beauty and grace of this forest child as she stood there with eyes down bent on the ground, with such an air of modesty and innocence that he even felt a pang of regret, when, for the sole pleasure of looking at him, the wood nymph flung back the amber clouds of hair which enveloped her, and lifting her eyes made above them a sort of penthouse with her clasped hands, thus showing them perfect from the little rounded wrists to the very tips of the tapering fingers.

"We have got a horse like him," said the girl, as the Don neighed again, and won another eager response from the distant encampment. "Hermann brought him from Tartary last year."

"Who is Hermann?" asked Valentine, curiously, while his fingers played with the Don's flowing mane, and he continued to gaze at the picture before him with a fixed, eager glance.

The girl's lip curled somewhat scornfully. "Hermann is Hermann," she replied, in listless tones; "one of our people."

"How many are your people?" asked Valentine, feeling that he must know something of those to whom this lovely child belonged.

"There are a great many," replied the girl; "and Hermann is my cousin. He is not altogether like our people," she continued, with more spirit in her tones. "They all look up to Hermann."

"Do they love him so?" asked Valentine, for the mere pleasure of hearing the girl speak.

"No; they fear him."
"And he is dear to you?" asked Valentine, curiously.

The question won a look of surprise from

the dark eyes; but before the girl could answer a voice rang through the forest, a voice with a rough tone of anger in it calling "Zitella! Zitella!" and at the repeated sound of her name the gipsy started like a frightened fawn.

"I must go," she whispered, hastily.

Then, with one more wistful look, she turned, and fled away through the forest with the speed of an antelope until she disappeared from view, when Valentine felt as if the sun had set, and with it the whole beauty of the scene.

"I must see her again," thought Valentine, as he continued his journey along the forest path, which was now haunted by a vision of those lovely dark eyes looking up at him through a confusion of amber tresses.

"Heaven! how exquisitely fair she is!" continued the young man. "The very air which she breathed it seemed to borrow life and beauty from her presence! And 'Zitella,' what a lovely name! How wild and free, like herself; and soft as—as this forest breeze!"

Valentine passed on the name, repeating it softly once or twice, then urged his steed onwards, for there was a restless mood upon him, and he would fain have banished from his mind the memory of this lovely being, for whom he sighed to think that she was only a gipsy, ignorant, wild, and unchristianized.

Then came the thought he might be able to do something to better her condition, and so Valentine determined to see Zitella again, but by herself, if possible, for he had no desire to make acquaintance with the gipsy settlement.

Valentine rode on to the house, where he found a tolerably comfortable inn, and a very old acquaintance.

The two talked together of days in which no cloud had shadowed the horizon of Valentine's life. The two talked together, and in the renewal of old and happy memories, the episode of the forest was forgotten; but when the friend had taken his departure, Valentine thought once more of Zitella; and, having many idle hours on his hands, the young man thought that they could not be better employed than in the cultivation of the gipsy girl's acquaintance.

Accordingly, one morning Valentine called for his horse, and braving the unwholesome high road, traversed the two or three miles which lay between the town and the forest that had been the scene of his first sight.

That very morning Zitella had wandered far from her companions, so far that even her little young limbs grew weary, and at length she lay down on a bank of thick green moss by a broad rivulet, under the shade of drooping chestnut boughs in the full bloom of their beauty.

The green boughs threw tender shadows on the lovely face, making a picture which, as he drew near, caused Valentine to hold his breath while he dismounted, and leaving the Don to follow at his pleasure, approached the slumberer with a cautious tread, on his feet still.

One little hand rested beneath the girl's cheek, the fingers of the other pressed the stem of a crimson flower which was springing up through the moss, as if she had been about to pluck it, when, like the sleeping beauty of old, Fairy Slumber came and sealed her eyelids.

"Love, if thy lashes be so dark,
How dark those hidden eyes must be!"

Valentine was by the girl's side now, and as he gazed upon the lovely sleeping form he could scarcely refrain from bending down and pressing his lips to the tiny hand which held the stem of the flower, but as he thought about it the girl raised her eyelids slowly, and looked at him with a gaze, half wondering half confused.

Gradually a smile of recognition dawned round the wood nymph's lips, warming Valentine's heart as the first rays of spring sunshine warm the perished earth; but the smile now

led to something like a frown as Zitella said imperiously,

"You awake me, I was having a happy dream!"

"Pardon me!" murmured Valentine, with a slight smile. Then, after a moment's pause, he continued, lightly, "When the prince awoke the sleeping beauty she rewarded him with everlasting happiness. You will be less merciful, but prithee, sweet maiden, if you are the queen of this forest, and mean to punish me for my crime, let me be changed into one of those chestnut trees that I may watch over your noontid slumber."

Zitella smiled, but her eyes assumed a wondering expression, and Valentine saw that though his words charmed her ear she did not understand their meaning. He must speak to her in simpler language.

But it was difficult to start a conversation with one who had spent all her life in the forest, and probably knew little if anything of civilized ways.

True, there was nature—the trees, the flowers, the stream—the lark at that moment singing high at Heaven's portal, and filling the earth and air with melody; but Valentine thought that long familiarity with these things would have dulled the girl's perception of their beauty, and it would have disappointed him greatly to see no responsive glow of sympathy in those dark eyes when he spoke of the bird's song, or the red flowers springing through the green grass.

"What deep earnest eyes you have, child," said Valentine at length. "You look just now as if you were gazing into the future. I should like to know what you see there for yourself."

The girl smiled dreamily, but though she lowered her gaze there was no trace of conclusion on the perfect face.

"Or for me," continued Valentine, after a slight pause. "I wish Zitella, that you would tell me my fortune."

Zitella's red lips curled scornfully. She turned away her head with a haughty gesture which astonished Valentine. An empress, he thought one moment, must look undignified and plain before this imperious child of the forest.

"I do not tell fortunes," said Zitella, after a little while. "You must go to Zera, my foster-mother, who will unravel the mystery of your future."

"I would rather hear it from you," persisted Valentine, with a smile. "I am sure you can tell me what I want to know."

"What do you want to know?" asked the girl, languidly, and still without glancing at her companion.

Valentine felt piqued at her indifference. He thought of the high-born, lovely women who had once lavished on him their tenderest smiles, for, until he left it of his own accord, he had been the pet and darling of society.

It was hard to be dismissed by an unsophisticated child who had never left the forest, but just then Valentine felt that Zitella's brightest smile would buy the beauty of all the world's women a hundred times over.

The gipsy girl's voice broke in on his reflections.

"You want to know," she murmured, languidly, "if you will be rich and great?"

"No, that I do not," was the energetic reply. "I am great already, as far as worldly position goes, as great as ever I wish to be, for I have no ambition, and I have more money than I can spend; but," tenderly, "there is one thing I want to know that you can best tell. Will any one ever care for me, say, for instance, such a sweet maiden as you?"

A delicate pink colour like that of a new rose stole into the girl's cheek, and by the tremulous heaving of her bosom Valentine could see that she was touched out of her contemptuous indifference to him, but still she continued to avert her eyes, gazing on the rivulet in silence, and Valentine, though he

scanned the face closely, failed to read the workings of the girl's mind.

"Care and dear," she murmured at last, in musing tones, "what do these words mean? Yesterday you asked me if Hermann was dear to me."

"Poor child!" said Valentine, pityingly. "There must be little tenderness in your life if the meaning of such words are unknown to you!" Then, after a pause, he added, quickly, "Do you know nothing of love?"

Zitella looked up at her questioner with wide open and half eager eyes.

"Love?" she repeated, dwelling on the word as if it pleased her. "No. What is it? Will you teach me?"

Valentine's face flushed and paled with keen and swift-changing emotion. The girl's innocent question first filled him with delight, then smote his heart with a guilty pang.

"Oh, not I," he exclaimed, passionately; and then, after a pause, he added, impressively, "You are happy in your ignorance, Zitella. And why not, for you are only a child; and knowledge of such things will come to you all too soon."

"I am fourteen," replied the girl, coldly. "Zanoni, my foster-sister, is only two years older, and she is married—married to Ishmael."

"Zitella, do you want to be married?" asked Valentine, in a disappointed tone.

"I want to learn things," replied the girl, disdainfully. "I know nothing."

"You are a foolish child. Knowledge will not increase your happiness."

Zitella's lip curled scornfully.

"I do not want to be happy," she said, in a calm, deliberate way. "I want—"

"To love, to be loved," put in Valentine as the girl paused, as if in need of a word to express her thought.

"I want to be great, to have power."

Zitella spoke slowly, and with intense scorn; and Valentine, listening, felt a sharp pang of disappointment that one so young and fair should be the slave of ambition.

It was a bitter disillusion, but he only said earnestly,—

"If this is your desire, Zitella, then, love, be lovable; this is the secret of a woman's power."

Zitella's face grew pale, a strange, lurid light flashed up in her eyes for a moment, and made them more lovely than ever.

She leaned her cheek on her hand in a thoughtful attitude, and Valentine just caught the whispered murmur which fell from her lips in words that did not seem meant for her companion's ear.

"I am to be betrothed to Hermann in a few days."

"Do you love him, Zitella?" asked Valentine with a thrill of pity.

"I do not know," replied the girl, thoughtfully. "He is tall and strong, with handsome dark eyes; and he brings me presents from the towns. Then he is great, the greatest of all our people. As Hermann's wife I should have power. The others would look up to me as they look up to him."

Valentine for a moment forgot the beauty of the face and form before him in the disgust and anger caused by these words.

But these feelings did not last long. Soon pity of Zitella overcame him, and in his anxiety to save her from the fate on which she was walking blindly, he said in earnest tones,—

"Child, you must not marry Hermann if you do not love him. You are so young, your heart is yet asleep; and when it wakes it will not be to the man whom you have married without love."

Zitella shrugged her shoulders, and looked very repellant as she heard these words.

"Oh! why do you dwell on that string?" she asked, impatiently. "Did you come to the forest to talk to me of love?" Then, before Valentine could answer, she continued, wearily, "But you do not understand. You forget that I am a gipsy, and a gipsy I must

marry, or not at all. And why not Hermann? He has more power than any of the others, and I like him better than any one else."

And, hearing this, Valentine could utter no further protest, nor did he desire to.

His interest in the girl was changed to contempt that almost amounted to dislike. Even her beauty failed now to move him.

He shuddered at the thought of the contrast between mind and body.

He deemed it well that Zitella's life should be spent in the forest, for here, at least, the power for which she thirsted would be limited; but, let loose about the world, what harm might she not make in the exercise of her dangerous wiles? for Valentine knew too well how little scruple there is in worldly ambition.

"Hermann has always plenty of money," mused Zitella, looking up at her companion with a smile that showed all her dazzling white teeth, "and when I am his wife," she continued, "I shall have plenty of it to spend, for I shall know all his secrets then, and he will fear to refuse me anything. I shall not have to wait until he gives me a little present," and Zitella laughed as if the prospect of being able to spoil her future husband was very delightful.

Valentine felt almost sick for a moment; but the knowledge that she was mercenary could not make Zitella appear one whit less beautiful, and never had her beauty appeared so beautiful as it did now, looking up at her companion with her dark eyes glittering, and a lovely flush on her face; but there was a large share of contempt blended with Valentine's admiration. He put his hands in his pockets, and producing some coins of silver and gold threw them into the girl's lap.

"There," said he lightly, "when you go to the town you can buy some pretty things, and when we meet again you can tell me if you've been any happier for this money."

But when Valentine rode away a few moments later he uttered the hope that he had seen the last of the gipsy girl.

A week or more passed; but though Valentine lingered on in the town the forest was never revisited, and he saw no more of Zitella, who was completely forgotten, except at rare intervals, and then only thought of with unforgotten contempt and aversion as one who added another name to the long list of those who had brought him disappointment and disillusion.

"You've been a long time away, sir, and there's been somebody waiting in your private room for more than an hour." So Valentine Eyre was one afternoon accosted by his English servant on his return from a long ride.

"A person waiting to see me and in my private room?" asked Valentine, with barely suppressed anxiety. "How is this, Valence," he continued, hurriedly, "did you get no name?"

Valence flushed crimson in fear of his master's displeasure which he hastened to disarm by an ample apology.

"Indeed, sir, I hope I did not do wrong in admitting the youth, but he refused to give his name, only assuring me that his visit was a matter of life and death, and concerned your personal safety."

Valentine flung down his hat, riding whip and gloves, and hurrying past the man, reached and entered his private room.

As he crossed the threshold the occupant of the apartment rose to greet him, and Valentine stood still, lost in astonishment.

CHAPTER II.

In spite of the peasant boy's costume and closely cropped head Valentine recognised Zitella.

He uttered one astonished exclamation and then stood still, at a loss for words or power of movement, while Zitella advanced to meet him with no sign of confusion or shame in

her face, though she glanced anxiously towards the door, and her hands were clasped with a supplicating gesture.

"Child, what mad folly is this?"

The question broke at last from Valentine, in hushed tones, but the words were scarcely uttered when he became conscious of the change which the last few days had wrought in Zitella's face; her cheeks had lost some of their rounded softness, and there were heavy, violet circles under the eyes, which had a wild, feverish expression, as if the girl were labouring under some strong excitement.

At Valentine's question Zitella's cheeks and neck became suffused with crimson. She struggled with her emotion for some time, and then being conquered, hid her face in her hands, weeping bitter, though silent, tears, during which she sank on the ground at the feet of Valentine, who gently raised and placed her in a chair.

"This folly is for your sake!" sobbed Zitella, when Valentine returned to her side, having secured the door against all intruders.

"Forgive me, my child," murmured Valentine, now repeating of his first ungentle words, and as he spoke he unconsciously laid his hand on the pretty head, now void of gear, and shorn of its magnificent wealth of amber tresses.

"For you! for you!" sobbed Zitella, through her clasped fingers.

"For me!" echoed Valentine, in rather cold, puzzled tones. He was hardening in the momentary conviction that this display of grief, was not genuine; but when Zitella's tears broke forth with renewed violence his chivalrous nature was deeply stirred, and tender words sprang of their own accord to his lips.

He took Zitella's hand in his, and assuring her that he was her friend, bade her unburden her heart of all its grief, and when Zitella once more reiterated the assurance that this daring adventure was for his sake, he implored of her to dry the eyes which were too lovely to be darkened with one single tear for him.

Zitella sat up, casting one fearful, anxious glance round the apartment, and at the door; then being assured that they were alone, and secure from all eavesdroppers, she forced herself to be calm, and laying her hand on Valentine's, looked up with tear-dimmed eyes into his face.

"It is death to you," she whispered, "if you will not believe me, to me if you betray what I am now going to reveal! But first," and she seized her companion's hand, "be sworn to secrecy; swear to me by all you hold dear and sacred that you will obey me in all things, betray me in none."

Zitella's voice, and looks and gestures were all full of the most intense and passionate excitement; but Valentine was not carried away by any of these. His first doubts returned in stronger tones, and he replied in cold and cautious tones that he would not be bound by any oath, but if Zitella could prove that she had come with a noble, generous motive, however rash or foolish, he would shield her with his life from the consequences.

Zitella's eyes flashed dangerously for a moment, her face flashed crimson, and then grew deadly pale.

"You do not trust me?" she exclaimed. "Ah, well, it will make no difference if I can only convince you of the danger in which you stand!"

There was such intense sorrow in the girl's tones, such fervent truth, that Valentine became at once ashamed of his doubts. He took her hand, saying earnestly,—

"Pardon me, Zitella, I do trust you implicitly, and, as a proof of this, I swear secrecy before I hear a word you have got to say."

"You promise this?"

"Most faithfully!"

Zitella drew a deep breath of relief.

"Now," she exclaimed, "I can fulfil my purpose without fear, but at any cost I would have done that."

She paused a moment then, as her hand lightened on her companion's, continued in hurried whispers,—

"You have heard me speak of Hermann. He loves me, but it is with a false and cruel love, and as he loves me so he hates you. He has sworn by an oath—that will not be lightly broken—to take your life!"

Valentine interrupted with a hasty exclamation of unfeigned astonishment. He withdrew his hand from Zitella's, feeling a return of his first mistrust; and as he gazed at the girl he questioned in tones that were no less searching than his glance.

"My life! Why should Hermann, the gipsy, lift his hand against me? I have done him no wrong!"

Zitella's downcast face was suffused with vivid blushes; but the fact that she avoided her companion's eyes betrayed no want of truth. It seemed natural that the young girl should feel embarrassed by the confession which she had undertaken to make.

"Hermann watches all my actions," she said, in a low voice. "He saw us speak to one another that first day you rode through the forest, and again by the rivulet where you found me asleep."

"This was all Zitella said; but her mantling cheek, her faltering tones, and downcast air, told a great deal that even Valentine could not fail to see.

He turned away sharply and walked through the room, until Zitella's voice suddenly raised brought him back to her side.

"Why did you disturb my life?" she cried, in choking tones; "but for your words I should not yesterday have refused to become betrothed to Hermann. I should have thought of none but him, and knowing, fearing nothing I should have been perfectly happy."

"Poor child!" said Valentine, with deep and bitter self-reproach in his tones as he took one of the girl's small hands in his.

Zitella broke into passionate weeping.

"Yes, poor, poor Zitella!" she wailed between strangled sobs, "who has lost her old life for ever, her green wood, her foster-mother, her dreamless repose of heart, and all that made life dear, and Hermann," she added, rearing her head with a gesture half fierce, half despairing, "yes, even he is something to regret; so handsome, strong, and generous as he is."

"Zitella, why must you forfeit all this?"

Valentine spoke absently, for his thoughts were absorbed in the lovely face, which now flushed with scorn at his lack of comprehension.

"Could I go back to those whom I have betrayed for your sake, or could I leave you to fall by the hand of Hermann, who, having learned that you leave this town to-night has planned to take your life as you ride all unexpecting along the desert highway?"

Valentine thought of the revolvers which he always carried primed and loaded on his person, and involuntarily his hand reached and grasped one of the weapons; but reflecting that it would probably have availed nothing against an ambush, he felt that he owed his life to Zitella's devotion.

"How shall I repay you for this?"

But Valentine's impetuous words were interrupted by Zitella, who started up as if she had been stung. Her slender form shivered in the intensity of her scorn, as she stood before her companion, and flashing her splendid dark eyes upon him, said in tones, whose haughty calmness seemed to chill her as they were uttered,

"Speak to others of reward, but not to me. The service which I have rendered you cannot be repaid with money!"

"Zitella!" cried Valentine, in pained tones, "you misunderstand. I did not speak to you of the reward which I should offer to a hireling, but all you have done for me." He paused, as if overcome by emotion, then tightly touching the shorn head went on gently, "Even this sacrifice alone was too great."

Once more Zitella's face became all tender. She cast her eyes on the ground, while soft warm blushes suffused her cheek.

"My hair will grow again," she murmured, softly, "but you—" she paused, and with an eloquent upward look, added earnestly, "a dead friend can never be won back."

Moved by an irresistible impulse Valentine stooped and imprinted a kiss on the girl's brow; but the act was scarcely accomplished ere Valentine recoiled in guilty terror, and gazing where his lips had pressed, fancied they left a crimson ineffaceable spot.

"Zitella, ask me to do something for you!" he cried, passionately, noticing the girl's livid cheek and the strange gleam in her lovely eyes.

"Think kindly of Zitella," was the reply, and the girl moved towards the door as she spoke; but Valentine springing forward stood between her and her goal.

"Zitella, child," he asked, "where are you going to?"

"Anywhere; I care not!" and the proud head drooped lower and lower beneath the man's gaze, "anywhere that Hermann cannot find me to avenge his betrayal, for whether you speak or not, he will know that it was Zitella who snatched his prize from him, and I am so young," she added, with a sob, "life is still dear."

"Zitella, life shall be dear, as dear as I can make it."

Valentine forgot all his past now in the passionate tide of feelings which swept over his soul. "Did you think," he continued, "that I would be so base as to let you go forth unprotected and alone? No, child, you have saved my life, and henceforth yours shall be my care. No father or brother could be more to you than I shall be," he added, fervently, as he drew towards himself the form which was all the more beautiful for its boyish diaphanousness.

But Zitella drew herself away with feverish impatience.

"No, no, let me go!" she exclaimed, stretching out her hands with a gesture of repulsion. "You do not know, you must not ask, only let me go," she added, incoherently.

"Zitella, I will ask no questions, seek to know nothing," replied Valentine. "I have," he continued, "secrets in my own past which you, a child, cannot share; but you have for my sake abandoned your kindred, and I mean to take their place. Listen, my child," he took the girl's passive hand in his, "listen, while I unfold the plans which I have this moment made for your future."

Zitella trembled, but did not withdraw her hand, and Valentine went on.

"The other day, Zitella, you wished for knowledge and power. Well, you shall have the first placed at once within your reach, that is if you are willing to go to England—"

"With you?" interrupted Zitella, raising her eyes for one swift, eager glance.

Valentine hesitated a moment, but at last replied,—

"No, not with me. But as my ward you would go to England with a friend of mine, a noble lady who is on the eve of starting from Madrid. Lady Fitzroy," continued Valentine, "would take you to London and place you in a school, where you would receive a first-class—. Why, what is this, Zitella?" for the girl, in a sudden paroxysm of pain, had flung herself on the ground at her companion's feet.

"Oh, I cannot go! I cannot leave you!" came in wild, broken utterances from the prostrate form on the floor. "I have sacrificed all for you. Let me stay here, anywhere by your side."

Poor Valentine! The moments which followed were cruel. His heart and brain ached from the fierce conflict. He believed that this child loved him with such love as none had given before or would ever give him. But what an infamous soundrel he would be to repay her self-sacrificing devotion by taking advantage of her innocence, and all that was

noblest in him awoke. He triumphed over temptation, saying in gentle, but firm tones,—

"Zitella, my child, you know not what you ask. How should you? You know nothing, nothing of the world,—so quick to see so harsh to judge—"

"Let me stay with you," sobbed Zitella. "I care for nothing else so that I am by your side."

Valentine dared not look on the pleading face lest he should give way, but he raised the weeping girl and placed her tenderly in a chair.

"Zitella," he said, gently, "you are but a child. You cannot understand. Heaven knows," he added, bitterly, "how hard it is for me to refuse your innocent prayer, but did I grant it I should be doing you a wrong for which the world would punish you."

Zitella lifted her eyes and fixed them on Valentine's face with an air of wondering, innocent pain; then clasping her small hands she said, intreatingly,—

"Leave me a moment or two. Go to the farther end of the room and stand where I cannot see you. When I want you again I will call you."

Valentine was prompt to obey this strange behest. He walked to the high, barred window and stood looking down into the narrow, gloomy street in which there was scarcely a person to be seen.

His heart was heavy with the forecast of evil, his brow marked with the scourge of an irretrievable past, but as he almost cursed the fate which had brought him across Zitella's path the sound of his name softly breathed brought him back to the girl's side.

He took her hand and looking into her face saw that in the last few moments some great change had occurred. She was quite calm and composed now, and the eyes which met his were dry and tearless.

"I know now," she said, softly, "how noble you were to refuse my prayer. I will obey your every command, go where ever you bid me."

She looked so lovely as she uttered those words that Valentine could scarcely refrain from pressing his lips once more to her brow, but he triumphed over the desire, and looking away from his companion, said in tones that sounded very cold and business-like in his own ears,—

"If you are willing to go, Zitella, there is no time to be lost, for we have a two days' journey to Madrid, and I know that Lady Fitzroy starts at once for England."

"I cannot go like this," and Zitella blushed deeply as she looked down at her disguise.

Valentine thought a moment, then suggested that he should leave Zitella within locked doors, so that she should be safe and free from all intruders, while he went forth to purchase some garments suitable for her journey.

Zitella acquiesced more by looks than words, and having made his charge for the time being a captive, Valentine left his man Valence on charge, with injunctions to admit no visitor on any pretext whatever, and sallied forth on an expedition which was altogether new to him.

The resources of the town being slender, Valentine found much difficulty in procuring such garments as would be suitable to a young lady of rank, for it was the Englishman's intention to pass Zitella off as the orphaned daughter of one Ferdinand de Leon, a friend of his lately deceased.

At length, having procured a suitable and somewhat costly outfit for his supposed ward, Valentine returned, and softly unlocking the door of his private apartment, entered, and found Zitella, fast asleep in a wide, low chair.

Though time was precious, he would not wake her; but, stealing with noiseless steps to her side, stood as the minutes fled by gazing on that lovely face, the long, jetty lashes of sealed lids sweeping a cheek which contrasted well with the crimson velvet cushion on which the slumberer's head was reclining.

At length a noise on the corridor roused Zitella from her slumber, and, starting up, she gazed at Valentine with eyes in which for a moment there was no gleam of recognition.

"I have brought you some garments," said Valentine, in gentle tones. "I will go and see about a travelling carriage while you equip yourself," he added; and then, assuring the girl that there was no time to be lost, with a few more words the young man retired, locking the door as before; but when on returning after some time he found recognition most difficult, for Zitella looked not only indescribably lovely, but altogether different from her former self in a rich velvet dress and black lace mantilla.

When the first stages of the journey were over, Valentine hired a female attendant for his ward.

The woman was middle aged, and having met with sad reverses, looked on her engagement to Donna Zitella de Leon as a special stroke of fortune.

She accepted without question the story that Donna Zitella's former maid had succumbed to sudden illness on the road; and so, with well-veiled triumph, the gipsy girl bade farewell for ever to her former identity.

At Madrid the party found Lady Fitzroy, a stately high-bred Englishwoman, who received Valentine Eyre very cordially, and for his sake condescended to smile, though icily, on Zitella; but when Valentine, not without secret pangs of conscience, had announced that his ward was the child of Don Ferdinand de Leon, her ladyship, who loved noble names, became very cordial to the gipsy girl, and when Valentine asked her as a favour to escort Zitella to England Lady Fitzroy was prompt to declare that the pleasure was all on her side.

"The poor child knows nothing," whispered Valentine, aside. "Her father has been guilty of culpable neglect towards his only child," continued the young man, wishing to account for Zitella's ignorance, which he knew the woman of the world would speedily discover.

"With that lovely face ignorance is pardonable," replied Lady Fitzroy, as she glanced at Zitella through her gold-rimmed eye-glasses. "The girl is most *distinguée*," she continued, "and so young, only a child. Depend upon it she will grow into a charming woman."

"You are very gracious to say so," replied Valentine, feeling more conscience-stricken than ever at the fraud which he had practised. Her ladyship would draw in her skirts to save them from contact with a vagrant, was the young man's bitter thought.

Having arranged everything for Zitella, Valentine was anxious to take his departure, but Lady Fitzroy would not hear of this.

"We start in a few hours," she said, "but first there will be a repast of some kind, and in that you must join us. What, you want still to run away? Well, this is very traitorous to our old friendship, when I owe you so much too for the pleasure which you have brought me in the companionship of this charming child."

Valentine's cheek flushed, and he was about to utter some hasty protest when he was checked by the entrance of a servant, who announced that dinner was waiting in the adjoining room.

Valentine had then no choice but to offer his arm to his hostess, and as they lingered round the informal meal the young man forgot his treachery in a critical survey of Zitella which became every moment less and less anxious, for though the girl never once opened her lips her mien and motion were faultless. One looked to the manner born, and her very silence seeming born of languor rendered her beauty more effective.

Valentine was beginning to congratulate himself on the success of his scheme when his hostess, leaning slightly forward, said in a clear tone,—

"You are so silent, Mr. Eyre, and there is so much I am anxious to hear. You have not told me one word of your charming wife?"

Valentine's face became livid. He felt,

though he steadily avoided meeting their glance, that Zitella's eyes had been swiftly raised to his.

Then, with his eyes on his plate, he replied to Lady Fitzroy's remark with these careless words,—

"Celia, my wife, is quite well, and I trust happy; but she is devoted to Cemema, while I"—with a short laugh—"am by nature a vagrant!"

"Like your father!" rejoined Lady Fitzroy; "but I hear he is greatly changed from the days in which I knew him. Then he was a thorough Bohemian; but you eat nothing, Mr. Eyre. Will you not be induced to take a little melon?"

And so the conversation was once more skillfully steered into harmless and pleasant channels.

The moment of parting had come, and was passed, and as Valentine lingered on the steps of the villa near Madrid, listening to the last roll of Lady Fitzroy's carriage wheels Zitella raised her eyes to the face of her companion, whom she addressed for the first time, and in very intelligible Spanish,—

"Mr. Eyre did not tell me that he was married. It is true," this was added after a pause, "that I have not known him long."

Lady Fitzroy looked thoughtfully at the girl, whose musical voice finished the charm which her loveliness had already begun.

"Valentine Eyre has a peculiar disposition," said Lady Fitzroy, at last, "and I fancy his marriage was not happy. It was never made very clear, but I heard some story of a ceremony having been performed in haste by the death bed of his uncle Don Juan de Nunez, and, I suppose, having married his cousin in haste, he has naturally repented at leisure; but with all his faults," added Lady Fitzroy, "kindly Valentine Eyre is really noble, and I am sorry if his life has been spoiled."

Zitella looked out of the carriage window with some remark on the beauty of the scenery through which they were passing.

She had no desire to pursue the subject of Valentine Eyre any further, and Lady Fitzroy could not help wondering at this indifference. She had been unfavourably impressed by the coldness of the girl's farewell to her guardian.

It was strange to see a southern nature so passionless, she thought, but Zitella was something more than passionless, she was sullen, though in a way which did not interfere with her power of fascination, and lovely as were her eyes, there was a fitful and dangerous gleam in them which made her companion uncomfortable.

Those fingers looked formed to use a stilet, as I should a needle, was her ladyship's inward comment as she looked down at the hands which lay in Zitella's lap.

Meanwhile, Valentine, lingering still where his friends had left him, heard the lost carriage wheels replaced by the swift approach of horse's feet.

With the sound came a swift presentiment of ill, and the Englishman listened anxiously until a horseman appearing in the avenue gained his side in a few moments.

"Mr. Valentine Eyre?"

"The same."

And Valentine stretched eagerly to grasp the missive which the horseman eagerly tendered.

In an instant the seal was broken, and Valentine had read the few lines inclosed.

"Your wife's hours are numbered. If you would not be too late lose no time in coming!"

With a livid cheek and heavily beaded brow, Valentine rushed into the house crying hoarsely.—"Good Heaven! What have I done! My wife! Valentine, my horse without a moment's delay!"

There were a dozen to obey the call, and soon Valentine was in his saddle, and the fleet limbs of his steed had left the capital far behind.

(To be continued.)

THE SECRET WHICH PARTED THEM.

—X—

CHAPTER XL.

LEONI upon his return to town found a letter asking him to dine at the Earl's mansion in Mayfair, written by the Viscount. He said nothing else whatever, and the artist sent a messenger with an answer to say he would be there at the hour appointed.

The Earl was not in the drawing-room at the time of his arrival. In fact, he was rather early, and Lady Winifred only was in the room, and she came towards him with so bright and glad a look that it was reflected upon his face also.

"I am so glad you are back! We quite missed your dropping in!" she said.

She might have changed the *we* for *I*; but maidenly reserve forbade.

"It would be very pleasant to think one could be missed," he replied, his dark eyes resting upon her softly.

Her hand lingered in his just a little longer than was conventional. A sweet, wild rose hue crept into her cheeks, and a tender light into her eyes as she raised them shyly to his. Then the Viscount entered and began his eager inquiries.

"Well! did you see Lady Constance?" he asked, "and did you gain the release from my promise?"

"Yes, you are to do what you consider best for yourself. Her ladyship is a grand woman; one can but admire her calm pride, and the way she stands quietly upon her own merits, not displaying them, but just keeping the accusing world at arm's length, with no show of temper or excitement."

"Oh! I am so glad that dear Lady Constance is alive; but how sad she must be!" said Lady Winifred, who looked charming, dressed in a costume of pale pink trimmed with white lace. "How I wish I could see her."

"Yes, she is undoubtedly sad; but perhaps by-and-by we shall be able to persuade her to receive her friends. That would do her good."

"I shall go to Vivian the first thing to-morrow morning, and have it out. You need not look at Winny, dear boy, she is nobody. And now about yourself. I have ascertained one thing, viz., that my Uncle Richard, who was then Viscount Venwood, did fall in love with a Miss Angelo, who was then companion to Lady Caithness; but that is all I can learn at present."

"My mother!" exclaimed Leoni, excitedly. "Then this would account for my likeness to your family, and, Lady Winifred, we should be cousins!"

"Should we?" asked the girl, brightly. "Why, of course we should, and that would be very, very nice; but, Stirling, I thought father said to-night that Uncle Richard did not marry?"

The Viscount made no reply. His dark eyes were fixed upon the ground.

Leoni Angelo turned pale, and there was a painful pause. Then Lady Winifred laid her hand upon the artist's arm.

"I accept you as my cousin," she said, very softly.

Her action seemed to touch him inexpressibly. He covered the small hand with his own for a brief space of time.

"Heaven bless you, Lady Winifred!" he answered, very low.

"And I accept you, too!" struck in the Viscount. "Uncle Richard and your mother were cruelly used. I am truly sorry for them both."

Leoni's lips moved to frame words; but he could not press the question of the marriage then before Lady Winifred, and yet he felt sure of his mother's honour and purity. Fortunately the entrance of the Countess broke the painful pause.

She was very pleased to see Leoni, and broached to him the subject of the portrait.

"I will do it for you with the greatest pleasure, as a friend," he replied, cordially; "but I have refused all orders for portraits. When would you like the first sitting, Lady Douglas? Shall I come to you, or would you prefer to visit my studio?"

One glance at her daughter's face decided her.

"Suppose we go to you," she said. "It will take up less of your valuable time; and since you are so very kind, you see we ought to consider that. Moreover, if the truth must be told, Wienny and I have rather a desire to see your pictures."

"You will find a very flattering one of yourself there, young lady!" laughed the Viscount.

A vivid blush swept over Winifred's cheeks. It made her glad to think that Leoni had thought of her when absent, and actually made a picture of her. The gong sounded for dinner, and the Earl of Douglas entered with much stateliness of manner. He started violently as his eyes met those of Leoni Angelo.

The young man might have been his brother Richard come back from the dead, so astonishing was the likeness. The hand which he extended to the artist trembled; and his son, looking on, saw it, and noted his extreme agitation. Whether his brother had married or no, he did not for one moment doubt but that this was his son. He could not pull himself together at all.

For twenty-five years nearly he had been the acknowledged Earl of Douglas, and if by any chance his brother had fulfilled that threat and married without his father's knowledge or consent, what then?

Great drops sprang to his brow at the thought. To lose his wealth and position would be to him the same of agony. To his proud nature to be pointed at as a usurper, and a dethroned monarch, would be more than he could bear.

He could say nothing. He could not talk.

The courses passed him one by one. He had not the nerve left even to hide his excited feelings.

He could scarcely remove his eyes from Leoni's handsome face. The servants wondered at their master, and his family noted his strained manner with apprehension. They were all afraid he was going to be ill, he looked so unlike himself. And he ever kept repeating that momentous question to himself.

If his brother Richard had married! If the shock which caused his father's death had been the breaking to him of this news, of the double news perhaps of the marriage and the birth of this son, what then? And how was it all to be proved?

The Earl knew little or nothing of what had taken place that evening. Those words rang in his ears to the exclusion of all other thoughts.

He had an oppressive consciousness that his brother Richard's voice was speaking, and that his face was before him. The Viscount and Leoni had but little opportunity for conversation that night, but he arranged to call for Leoni the following morning early, and that they should go together to see Colonel Vivian and Count Angelo, and be back to receive the Countess of Douglas and Lady Winifred by noon.

As soon as Leoni had taken his departure the Earl beckoned his son into his study, and having locked the door stood facing him.

"Why did you not tell me?" he moaned.

"Why did you subject me to such a shock, such an ordeal? Oh! what I have suffered to-night!"

"Do you know what it means to me if my brother Richard did marry?"

"But you said he did not, father!" replied the Viscount.

"I did—I did, but how can I tell? He might—he might. Men in love do very

strange, very wild and insane things. He may have married, and if so—"

He broke off suddenly, his eyes filled with an agony of apprehension.

"If my Uncle Richard did marry, this house belongs to Leoni Angelo, and not to you. The title which you have borne so many years is his, not yours. You have never been entitled to more than a younger son's portion; and, if Leoni chooses to demand it, I imagine he could make you refund his money which you have spent for so many years; but he seems a good-hearted fellow, and he would, I am sure, make no such demand. And more, up to the present time, I am certain he has not the remotest idea of the vastness of the importance, both to him and to us, of knowing the unvarnished truth."

"He wishes to prove the marriage for the satisfaction of his ancient kinsman, Count Angelo, whose heir he is, and to prove his mother, whom he loved very dearly, a blameless woman."

The expression in the Earl's eyes changed and grew evil.

He grasped his son by the arm in a vice-like grasp.

"Stirling, must he ever learn the truth?" he asked.

"Great Heaven!" cried the Viscount, "is it the truth?"

"No, no, I know nothing," retorted the Earl, hastily; "I swear it! But the likeness—the face—the voice—the figure! There is no question but that he is Richard's son. If there was no marriage, I would be kind to him for my brother's sake."

"I see," said the Viscount, almost bitterly. "And if there was a marriage you would be his enemy?"

"No, I should expect him to be kind to us."

"What do you mean by being kind?"

"You say he will inherit from his uncle. Italy is his country. Let him stay there. I will pay him what he pleases to keep silence."

"Father!" almost shrieked the Viscount, "you propose such a thing! you, a Douglas! No; right is right, and wrong is wrong. If Leoni Angelo is Earl of Douglas, the Earl of Douglas we must acknowledge him, so matter what the pain to us!"

He seemed to shrivel and grow into an old man at his son's words.

He shivered, and his teeth chattered in his head. His steps were uneven. He tottered to a chair by the table, and let his head fall upon his hands.

The Viscount was shocked.

The terrible change in his father touched his pity.

Was it possible that this stout, broken old man, who was proposing a dishonourable line of conduct, could be his proud father? It seemed well-nigh incredible.

"Father," said the son, in an earnest and ringing voice, "let us be men! If neither you nor I can be the Earl of Douglas we can both keep the honour of our family untarnished, and be proud of our name as ever!"

CHAPTER XII.

EARLY the following morning Viscount Venwood walked into the studio of Leoni Angelo, only to find another visitor there before him. Count Angelo was sitting in a low chair, listening with attentive interest to the story of Lady Constance, and also of his own belief that in the proud Douglas he had found his own relations.

It was at this juncture that the Viscount entered, and the Count simply stared at him in surprise.

"Olelle!" he cried. "Can there be any doubt? You two might be brothers!"

"Nay; but we may be cousins!" said Leoni brightly. "Count, let me introduce you to the Viscount Venwood. I believe my father was the last Viscount; but I do not know how it is to be proved. And this," continued

Leoni, turning to the picture, "is Lady Winifred, the Viscount's sister, a kind and gentle friend of mine."

"She is like you too, Leoni. What a sweet face it is. If I were a young man instead of an old one, I would not pass that by."

"Mr. Angelo," said the Viscount, pale and determined, "if you are the legitimate son of my uncle Richard my sister is not Lady Winifred, nor am I Viscount Venwood, nor can my father ever style himself the Earl of Douglas again! My uncle Richard was his father's eldest son, and his eldest son would inherit the title and the bulk of the property; it would not have passed to his brother had uncle Richard been known to have married and to be a father."

"If I had been born after his death?" asked Leoni, eagerly.

"It would make no difference at all, you would still inherit. The truth may as well be spoken out bravely and at once. If you can prove the marriage, you and not my father are the Earl of Douglas."

A flood of feelings rushed over the artist's face, too numerous to fathom, and after a long pause he spoke again.

"If my proving the marriage will bring harm to you all, then I will keep silence for ever!" he cried. "I have not too many real friends, and Lady Winifred has been more than kind to me. How could I so repay her?"

"Your words of unselfishness have made a friend of me, at any rate," said Stirling Douglas; "but I would not accept any such sacrifice at your hands. As I said to my father last night, if you are the Earl, the Earl you must be acknowledged, at whatever cost. And now, what about Colonel Vivian? I will go along if the Count thinks of remaining long."

"I! I am going back at once," said the old Roman nobleman, "and we may as well go together. I have heard Colonel Vivian's accusation against you, and I have heard of your denial of it from Leoni here, and I want to tell you that I do not believe one word of it. From what I see I should fancy the Colonel has given way to jealousy until he is starvedly mad. If he could be reconciled to his wife he might get over it; but apart from her never!"

They found the soldier pacing the room at the hotel, like a wild beast in a cage. A fit of extreme restlessness seemed to be upon him—his eyes were large and filled with a strange, fierce light.

When the three entered the room together Colonel Vivian glared at them.

"I am surprised, Count, to see you in such company," he remarked severely; then advanced to the Viscount with a lowering aspect, and a movement of his powerful right hand, as though he longed to be them.

"So," he cried, "you have ventured here, have you? Perhaps you think that Count Angelo's white hairs will protect you; but you are wrong. We have met as last, and only one of us shall leave this room alive. I have waited long enough for this day; and now it has come."

"Colonel Vivian," said the Viscount, calmly, "you are wasting fine language. In Heaven's name, what reason have you or I to thirst for one another's blood?"

"You ask that I do you?" cried the Colonel, in bitter scorn. "Hm, who have delighted my life! You, who robbing me of my wife's love, who have even lately been whispering your foul admiration and devotion into her ear, you ask that I do you? I will have it too!" and Colonel Vivian made a spring like a panther upon his supposed enemy.

Leoni was beside him in a moment. He seized the Colonel's arm, and said, "You two must hear one another out before you proceed to any such extremities."

"Leoni is right," broke in the Count. "It is for the Viscount to defend himself."

"I have no defence whatever to make," re-

plied he, with erect head. "The Colonel's accusation is the most wicked and cruel lie that ever was invented to destroy the peace of an innocent man and woman."

The two men stood gazing at one another—both in anger. That of the one fierce, vengeful, and full of hate, the other speaking of indignation and pride.

"You dare assert that you never cared for her or tried to supplant me?" shouted the Colonel.

"Dare is not in my dictionary, Colonel Vivian. I dare do anything which any other honest man might do. And I certainly assert that I never cared for Lady Constance Vivian except as a friend—and a very kind friend she has always been to me."

"You never wrote love-letters to her?" inquired the Colonel, scornfully. "No, of course not. You are, in fact, quite the type of that most despised of despicable people—the good young man who died. You have robbed me of my wife and home, and yet you have done nothing!"

"Your statement is at last correct," returned the Viscount, coldly. "I have done nothing!"

Furiously Colonel Vivian tore at his inner pocket and produced a letter.

"Whose writing is that?" cried the soldier, triumphantly.

"It is mine."

"To whom is it addressed?"

"To Lady Constance Vivian."

With fingers trembling, with agitation he drew the letter forth—and handed it to Count Angelo.

"Leoni, you have come here to be a judge. Count, kindly read that through. You have heard Viscount Venwood admit his own handwriting."

Count Angelo took the letter, and having read it to the end looked crestfallen.

The Colonel then gave it to Leoni, who smiled as he perused it. His sharp wit had seized upon the situation at once. He had not heard Lady Constance's story of the goings in the railway carriage for nothing.

"Yes! I have read it," he said, "and now I think the person who has the most right to it should do so," and without permission he placed the paper in the Viscount's hand.

An angry flush swept over the young man's dark face.

"How did you come into unlawful possession of this letter?" he asked, wrathfully.

"I entrusted it to Lady Constance's care, and my dear girl replied to it, and certainly never told me that it had not reached her hands. Were you madman enough to imagine that because that letter was in your wife's keeping that it was written to her? I should have thought you had too much common sense!"

Colonel Vivian had placed two pistols upon the table ostentatiously while the Viscount was reading the letter.

"Poor Stella!" murmured the young man, "and all this time I believed the had received my letter safely."

He seemed to have forgotten that there were onlookers, in his regret for his darling's disappointment.

A heavy hand was laid upon his arm.

"Stella!" repeated Colonel Vivian, his eyes fixed upon the Viscount's face. "What are you saying, man? Do you mean to tell me that this letter was addressed to her, and not to my wife?"

"Undoubtedly it was written to Miss Eustace. I have been engaged to her for years. I love her with all my heart, and my one desire is to make her my wife. Our engagement has not been permitted by either her father or mine; but Lady Constance was a friend to us, and conveyed our letters. I conclude you stole this one from her; and the Viscount bitterly."

"There is only one thing left for you to do. Take it to Miss Eustace, and tell her why it never reached her before, and ask her pardon for maligning her lover both to her

and her father," and without another word the Viscount walked with firm steps from the room.

"Colonel Vivian, I must wish you good-day," said the Count, with utmost politeness. "I am going to take up my abode with Leoni from now," and he followed the Viscount. Leoni hesitated, then stepped forward.

"You remember my golden dream?" he said, earnestly. "Well, I do not believe Lady Constance a less noble woman simply because she is beyond my reach. Acknowledge your error to her, confess your sorrow, and leave the rest to her."

Colonel Vivian looked up eagerly, but Leoni too was gone. He was alone. Tears—veritable tears of remorse—rushed to his eyes, great sob rose to his throat. This strong man wept like a child, and there is no more painful sight than to see a strong man sob.

After a time the storm passed by, and he ordered a brougham round. He knew he was not fit to be seen, and he thought he would be less noticed in this close vehicle. He meant to obey Viscount Venwood.

He drove to see Stella Eustace, and found that she was aware that Lady Constance had lost that letter, and she was much shocked to learn all the truth from Colonel Vivian.

"Oh! how I wish I had known about it," she cried. "One word of mine would have averted all this trouble from my poor dear friend, and now it is too late," and tears rolled down her cheeks.

"No, dear Miss Eustace, it is not too late," he murmured, with agitation.

"My ill-used wife is alive, and is in North Wales. I am going to her at once, and I want your permission to tell her that you have forgiven me. I am content to leave the rest to her. If the generosity of her nature has not become embittered by injustice and unkindness, she will forgive, but should she turn from the man who has so cruelly wronged her fair name, who can wonder? Not I, and I must bear my punishment as best I can."

"She will not turn from you," whispered Stella, "and you may tell her that I forgive."

CHAPTER XLII.

So once again Colonel Vivian was travelling to Llanrocken Bay, in a very different mood to any he had been in since he had accused his wife, and parted from her, so long ago. He was humble and subdued. His jealousy was lying dead at his feet with his unjust anger.

He had now nothing but gentleness and regret in his heart, and a tender yearning towards the wife he had so injured. He did not now walk to the Bay. He was in haste to see Constance. He found a trap and fast horse, and was whirled over to that picturesque little fisher village as quickly as possible.

He was shaken with agitation as he neared the cottage, and jumping down, he paid the man and bade him return, while he walked on alone.

Again he skirted the fence with its luxuriant shrubs and evergreens.

There was no sound now—no levers' voices to distract his tortured mind; but the gate leading to the shore was open. He looked in at the beautifully kept garden. It seemed to him Paradise, from which he was rightly shut out by reason of his sin—his sin against his pure-minded wife, whose honour he had stained with his own black thoughts.

All at once he forgot the garden and Paradise, even his own sin. He was drawn by an irresistible power, and he turned slowly, as one exposed to mesmeric influence, and there he saw his wife again.

She was standing close to the water's edge, apparently watching the setting sun, with the glow from the western sky in a glory upon the sweet sad face.

It was the old Constance, and yet a new Constance; the flies had done their work, had refined the golden heart.

It was a still and beautiful afternoon, with

the first suspicion of chill in the September air, the first touch of the rich tints of autumn upon the trees.

But although Lady Constance seemed to be intent on the sun god's glory, her eyes were really downcast, and she was thinking—thinking deeply of the past, of her husband's fault, not harshly, but regretfully.

A hymn came through the still air from one of the fishermen's cottages.

"Eternal Father, strong to save."

She had taught the fisherman's children herself to sing it, but now it seemed to bring a message to her, and the words of the hymn became interwoven with her thoughts like a bright golden thread.

What must we every one appear in the sight of that strong and eternal Father against whom we were sinning every day?

Her hands were clasped together. She made a really beautiful picture in her calmly mood, with her angelic face and attitude, and the glory upon her face and hair.

He, her husband, felt the power of her beauty; it intoxicated him like new wine, and ran like fire in his veins.

His pulses beat wildly—so wildly. His great eyes shone with a bright eager light. The beacon of hope was alight and leading him on.

For a time he dared not move. He seemed to fear lest he might drive away the bright vision.

Then she heard a footstep behind her, and surely she knew the step, for the sweet, sad, white face grew rosy red, then paled to white again, as white as a stately annunciation lily; but she neither moved nor stirred, nor uttered any sound.

A voice broke through the silence, a man's voice, pleading as for life, and a man's strong arm was about her slender waist, and after a time the fisherman's wives began to watch them, and to make their wondering remarks; for the good lady, good as she was, had laid her head to rest upon the stranger's breast, and they could not understand it at all!

It was just as great a nine days' wonder when Colonel and Lady Constance Vivian resumed to their place in society as when they deserted it; but they were too happy to care what anyone else said and did, and they were anxious for the happiness of their friends also, who had joyed and sorrowed with and through them.

Leoni was now one of their greatest friends, and Lady Winifred met him constantly at their house.

Whether the Earl knew it no one could make out. He had been like a man in a dream ever since Leoni had dined at his house, and neither approved of nor objected to anything.

Lady Constance saw from the first how Winny loved the artist, and determined to help on the match, and did so as only a clever woman can. It requires both tact and ability to be a successful match-maker, and the Colonel's wife had both.

One day she opened a cabinet containing papers of her dead mother's, and there she saw one packet marked with the name of "Marie Angelo." This she opened and read from beginning to end. It was the whole account of her "companion's" engagement and marriage, and there was with it a letter in a clear Italian hand, written in loving terms, telling of the birth of her baby boy Leoni; and there, too, was the certificate of her marriage with Richard, Viscount Venwood.

That heart-broken letter told how her husband's father had seen her; and although he believed her only engaged to his son, he had heaped such bitter reproaches upon her for ruining his prospects in life, that he had driven her from England, and soon after the birth of her boy she read of the tragic end of her husband in an English paper, and made up her mind never again to trouble the proud

Douglas, and in this letter she bade Lady Cathness farewell, thinking it better to break with England altogether, so as to keep her son from the knowledge of his father's people. Stella Eustace came in and found her still gazing at the finished letter.

"Oh, Stella!" she said, "the mystery of Leoni is cleared up at last, and I wish it were in any other way, for your sake."

The marriage certificate was lying open upon the table.

"I see," returned the girl, "and Constance, dear, don't be sorry. Stirling and I have often talked of it, and have thought it would probably end like this, and I don't mind at all. All I want is to be his wife, and I shall be quite as content as Mrs. Stirling Douglas as Countess."

"I suppose I had better give this to Mr. Angelo?" continued Lady Constance, "it concerns him most."

"Not if you wish him to gain his rightful place in the world. He would put the certificate behind the fire!"

"I believe you are right, Stella, Winifred will be Countess in your stead!"

"I think so too," said the girl with a smile.

"I have seen it coming on for a long time, and she will make a better Countess than I should do!"

The Viscount did not flinch one bit. He himself took the data to his father, and told him what it all was.

When he had ended, his father irritably and feebly bade him leave him, and he would look over the things himself. And apparently he did look over them.

No one liked to disturb him; but at length this wife's gentle pity overcame her prudence. She opened the door, the lamp still burned upon the table, and the papers were scattered about. Her husband sat staring at them.

She spoke to him, but he did not answer. She advanced into the room, and as she saw his face, saw his eyes, an expression of horror filled her own.

She laid her hand upon his; it was clay cold.

Then she crept away, her cheeks scarcely less cold and white than those of the dead man. She glided into the room, and beckoned her son into the hall.

"Why, mother, have you seen a ghost?" he asked.

"Hush, my boy! don't let Winny hear. This news has killed your father, Sir!"

Death is such a leveller! Stirling Douglas, no longer Viscount Venwood, grew as pale as his mother. He had never loved his father with any deep devotion in life, but in death he was dear to him. All the faults had been swept away in that hour. The virtues only remained.

It was fifteen months after, and there was a gathering at Sir John Eustace's old home in the Midlands, where he had learnt to love Gwendoline in the past of long ago.

And at that Christmas party were a number of familiar faces in our life drama. First and foremost there was the once Countess of Douglas, looking so young and handsome in her widow's dress that it was almost impossible to believe her to be the mother of the tall young man who entered the room with a fair girl at his side, both dressed in fur-trimmed garments, and he carrying a double burthen of skates.

"So you are running off with Stella to skate!" said Sir John Eustace, wickedly; "but I don't think you ever asked my permission, Douglas!"

"I wish, sir," said Stirling, in a low, earnest voice, as he rested his hand upon his chair, "that you would let me run away with my dear girl altogether!"

"Oh, I dare say!" laughed the Baronet.

"But if you carry off Stella, who is to take care of me in my old age, eh, young man? I have no mind to be left alone, I can tell you. Go and make love; you will do it whether I let you or no, so I may as well give in with a

good grace. Go on. I dare say your mother and I can do without you."

The young folks obeyed him quickly, and Sir John took Mrs. Douglas' hand, and led her to an easy chair by the fire.

"Gwendoline," he said softly, "this old house is pregnant with old memories. I have been thinking of the first day I told you of my love; and, my dear, whatever your feelings may have been towards me all these years I know not, but to me you have ever been the sweet Gwendoline to whom I plighted troth so long ago."

"Oh, John! I have loved you, and only you, all along," she murmured; "but surely you married for love? Surely you loved Stella's mother; she looked a sweet woman?"

A sad smile crossed his features.

"She was a sweet woman. I should be a brute to say I did not care for her. But, Gwendoline, what I had already given to you I had no power to give to her, however much I might desire it. It was no form of words when I told you you were, and ever must be, my all. Gwendoline, you are just as dear to me now as when our love was new! Let us forget all the sorrows and enjoy the joys of life and love for the years we have left. Come, dear one, if you will stay and cheer my existence your boy shall have my girl. I will bury the old ill-feeling for ever in his father's grave. What do you say, my own? Is that a compact?"

She lifted her eyes to his, laden with happy tears. Tears are not often happy, but hers really were.

"So we are to be at peace at last, John," she said, as he clasped her in his arms.

"Yes, thank Heaven!" replied the Baronet, cheerily, as he raised her sweet face to kiss her lips, and then turned to the door sharply. "A plague on you young people!" he cried, with pretended anger, as Leoni and Winifred stood open-eyed before him. "Do you think no one wants to make love besides yourselves? Your mother and I were lovers when we were far younger than you two; and we mean to be happy at last, Miss Winny, if you have no objection."

"Objection, no! Oh, I am, so, so glad, mother! so glad you are going to be happy! I always feared that some great sorrow had clouded your life; and now I understand it all," and the girl's arms were quickly about her mother's neck.

"I am glad too!" said Leoni, as he raised the elder woman's hand reverently to his lips.

"Hi! you there! Ship ahoy! Stop her!" cried Sir John, pretending wrath. "Off you go; and kindly place a placard on the outside of the door for me. 'Engaged,' that will do in both ways. Tell all the folks we're making love; we're not one bit too old for it, I can assure you, and we don't wish to be disturbed."

But they were disturbed, nevertheless. Mr. Pennington and Isola came in.

"Where is Winifred?" inquired the latter.

"We want her."

Sir John shook his fist at her playfully. "You deceitful little minx!" he cried; "that is not a true statement. There is only one person you have ever wanted since he saved that worthless little body of yours from drowning or burning, or a combination of both; therefore tell him so, and have done with it, my dear. We have three weddings coming on, and we may as well have the fourth while we are about it—eh! honest Jo Pennington? Go away, and make the child happy. It is time you did."

The door closed upon two red faces.

"Those young people wanted helping," laughed the Baronet.

"And you think you have assisted them?" said his fiancée with a smile.

"I am sure I have," and then he repaid himself for the interruption to his own joy.

"Little one!" whispered Jo, as he took Isola's little hand protectively within his own, "is it true, dear? Would you care to be

poor old Jo's wife, knowing as you do that he once loved another so fondly?"

"You cannot help that," she answered, gently; "and oh! yes! it is quite, quite true! I love you more than all the world besides."

At that answer he drew her into the shelter of his arms, and never was a wee bird happier in its nest than she in her harbour of refuge.

Winifred was walking beside Leoni, now the acknowledged Earl of Douglas, and he was looking down in her face with love.

"Winny," he was saying, "before you and I met, dear, I fell down and absolutely worshipped Lady Constance, not knowing her to be married. When I did know it; of course my dream was very roughly broken. But at that time I met a dear, sweet girl, who brought comfort at once to my heart, and little by little my love grew for her, till it crowded out the old adoration, and I found that it was quite full of love. Winny, sweetheart, you know well who that love was for. Darling, will you come into my life, and make its joys, and cheer its sorrows?"

He drew her hand through his arm.

"See, here is the Count coming to meet us," he said, smiling. "My dearest, may I tell him that you have promised? His heart is set upon you for my wife. I have half a mind to be jealous of him; see how he is smiling at you, dear!"

"Oh, Leoni, dear!" whispered the girl, "never be jealous. See what misery comes of it. Remember Colonel Vivian."

"I do. Yet they look happy enough now, do they not? How beautifully they skate together!"

"I wonder," whispered the girl, "in what words he could ask her to forgive such a wrong against her!"

"Ah! I expect that is known only to Heaven and themselves, Winny. My darling, are you happy?"

"More than happy!" she replied, smiling at him. And so seemed old Count Angelo.

"You will be a daughter to me, dear Winifred, and cheer me in my last days," he said, brightly. "I am very, very glad!"

[THE END.]

THE EYES OF THE PICTURE.

—:—

CHAPTER XX.—(continued.)

ARTHUR CHALLONER liked tears as little as any man, but he had reached an age when he could endure the sight of them with equanimity when he thought them salutary, as he did in this instance. He said not a word till Emily had controlled herself; and, besides, he could not but feel some sympathy with her.

"My dear Emily," said he, kindly, "I don't like to see you unhappy, but though you may think it harsh of me to say so, it really is not so much Leigh's fault as yours. Have you not been speaking to him about Mrs. Herbert?"

"I only asked him about that woman. I only implored him to give her up. Surely I, his sister, to whom his credit and happiness must be dear, surely I had a right to do that?"

"You did speak to Leigh about Mrs. Herbert?" said Challoner, not so calmly as before.

"You never told me that, Emily!"

"He asked me to say nothing about it, though I suppose you must have had your own ideas."

"Well, I knew that he was there pretty often; but when you talked about toils and a designing woman I thought you were exaggerating. I have heard about Mrs. Herbert lightly from one or two other people besides Greville. Do you mean that there is really anything?"

"He fired up the minute I said a word against her," said Emily, thinking her hus-

hand was getting into agreement with her. "She is a person of no standing, a perfect Bohemian, I hear, and he is infatuated. She may never have been married for aught any one can know!"

"I hope you didn't suggest that idea to Leigh; because if he cares about her I don't wonder at his firing up. Did you?"

"I thought it right to place the case fully before him," said Emily, drawing herself up.

"My dear Emily!"

He might have spoken volumes and not put as much into it as into those three words.

If Emily had not been a woman he would have probably used an expletive, decorous as his language habitually was.

"No wonder he comes rarely. You have put yourself in unnecessary antagonism to him. Right or wrong, if he is in love with this Mrs. Herbert, he wouldn't be worth much if he didn't stick to her against all the world. I should think you might have kept his confidence. When will you learn that he can't be driven? I half guessed there had been something of the sort between you, partly from his manner, mostly from yours."

"I have not changed in the least," protested Emily.

"You have, though you may not think it; and if I notice it, *a fortiori* he will, so much more sensitive as he is. You've done the worst thing you could for him!"

"I have done my duty!"

"Everybody says that when they've done some mischief," said Challoner, curtly. "I'm sure you meant well, Emily, but all you have done is to drive him away. I should have thought you might have tried to alienate him gradually from these people you object to."

"So I did, but it has been no good," said Emily, discreetly; "and, to crown all, Leigh takes up this horrible club. It's all that Mrs. Herbert's fault. Women like that always have high play at their houses. There was a case in the papers about it once—"

"About Mrs. Herbert?" said Challoner, inclined to laugh.

"No, no; but it's just the same. And being so much with her, Leigh has just followed her lead, and thinks no more of gambling than she does."

"So this is what has been worrying you all these weeks. Leigh falls in love with the wrong person, and this unfortunate Mrs. Herbert ends by driving him to a gambling club. It's a very pretty story put so, but there's another side, my dear, that you don't see!"

"I don't think there is," said Emily. "Heaven knows, he may have married this woman. If he has, I'll never receive her, never!"

"What do you know about her? I've heard various opinions, but I don't give much credence to them. Greville is not in love with her, yet he always speaks of her with the utmost respect. You are so hard on her, Emily."

"One judges people by what one sees."

"More often by what one does not see, my dear."

"Please don't interrupt me, Arthur. No young woman in our class lives as she does, knowing such indifferent people, quite by herself, very pretty, utterly silent about her husband, and her own birth, or even how she got her means. And yet Leigh, who is so proud of his good birth, resents it when I tell him all this. Of course, if he marries her he will be miserable."

"H'm!" said Challoner, "if she is all you seem to imagine I don't suppose there would be much question of marriage. I hope Leigh hasn't got into some foolish entanglement!"

Whereupon Emily got indignant, and her husband laughed.

"Pooh! Emily, you don't mean to say you think him immaculate?" he said. "I am inclined to think myself that the whole thing is not as you imagine; but still I haven't your profound faith in him. I do think such an entanglement is quite possible; but I don't like this estrangement, and I'm very glad you've

told me. I don't like this house being closed to him, particularly now."

"He knows he is always welcome," said Emily.

"He is not practically, if you let him see that you cannot forget this affair, especially as he knows what you think of the woman he loves."

"Arthur, I hope you are not angry with me," said Emily, anxiously. "I must speak about this club, I couldn't feel conscience clear if I didn't."

"Never mind your conscience; recognise its inconvenience for once, my love. Leave the matter to me. Angry with you! Well, I was vexed, I am afraid; but it's only because I love Leigh nearly as much as you do," said Challoner, crossing to his wife and kissing her. "Only I don't want to wrap him up in cotton wool as you do. Don't be so unhappy, the boy is all right."

"If I could think so," said Emily, sighing. "Anyhow, he can't be happy estranged from us all."

"Perhaps Mrs. Herbert is compensation," said Challoner, with an odd touch of sadness in his voice. "It's the way of lovers. You mustn't be hurt by what I've said, dear. I've been silent a long time, because up till now the effect of your mistake has been simply a lot of chaffing from Leigh, and you have always ended with laughing. Now it has become serious. You have made him feel that the yoke is real, and he has flung it off."

"I think," said Emily, not at all convinced, "that he might see it is all for his own good."

"He'd be the rarest being in creation then," said the lawyer. "I never knew the man yet who thanked me when I've told him he'd a bad case; and to tell a man, and Leigh of all men, when he's in love, or thinks he is, it's all the same, that it's for his own good to give the lady up, well, it's unreasonable to suppose he'll listen to it. Don't you do anything in this, Emily, and above all, not a word to Leigh. Do you quite understand me?"

"Of course it is no use for two to speak," said Emily.

She was still convinced that she would have the most influence, and was not a little jealous of anyone else taking her brother in hand, much as a mother might be with a favourite son.

"No, certainly not," assented her husband. "I think we will leave the matter there for the present."

He was, in truth, more uneasy than he chose to say to his wife; and his superior experience and sense made him more puzzled than she.

She sprang at once to a plain, unmistakable reason, he was not so satisfied. Altogether, he was very glad to meet the delinquent one day by a mere chance, as the lawyer was coming out of the Temple Library.

After mutual greetings, Erls court explained his unwonted presence there by saying business had obliged him to see his solicitor in Chancery-lane, and as he was so near he had looked in at Challoner's chambers, when the clerk had sent him on to the Library.

"Well, I'm delighted to see you," said the elder man. "Shall we have our chat in the gardens or in my room?"

"Oh! in the gardens," said sun-loving Erls court. "It's too glorious a day to be shut up in the house."

They crossed the lawn to the shaded walk at the left-hand side. Erls court inquired after Emily and Dora.

"Emily is well, but not in very good spirits. Dora has lost her sweet temper," was the reply.

Erls court half smiled.

"It's only an eclipse," said he, but made no allusion to his sister.

"I hope so. I'm afraid you're partly responsible for Emmie's state of mind," said Challoner. "You don't see her as often as you used, my dear boy, and Dora and I don't suffice for her happiness."

"I'll come and see her, of course," said Erls court, after the slightest pause.

This answer did not lead up to a real opening of the subject in Challoner's mind, so he was obliged to broach it in another way.

"Yes, do. I'm afraid it is partly her fault that you have not been so much in and out as usual."

"The fact is," said the other, frankly. "Emmie and I don't see some things in the same light, and I can't stand her lecturing. I don't mind any lectures from you, but she doesn't understand either the world, men in general, or me. It was all very well about trifling things when I called her Mentor and made fun of it; it's different now. It isn't because I'm wanting in affection or respect to her or you that I've kept away a good deal."

"I am quite sure of that. If you don't mind what I say, may I ask you a question? The matter has been worrying Emily, and, I must say, me too. I heard it before she did, but I said nothing to her, and have impressed on her to say nothing to you; but if I had not promised to speak, nothing would have stopped her."

"About King's, you mean?" said the painter quietly. "I've seen Tom Danby there several times, and of course I knew it would come round."

"You know, I suppose, that such clubs are illegal?"

"Yes, I know."

"Well, suppose anything happens. And besides, they simply gamble there, don't they? You never cared for play, and it makes Emmie very unhappy."

"I am sorry," said the other, in a low pained voice. "Think of me as well as you can, that is all I can say."

"We should never think anything else of you, my dear boy. Now, forgive me if I ask you, if you want money—if so—"

"No, no," said Erls court, "you are too generous. Indeed, I have plenty. If I had been making a fool of myself in any way I shouldn't be afraid to come to you, before I tried to make it up by play, but I haven't. I repeat, I can say nothing more. I do go to King's, and I can't give it up, or rather, lest you misunderstand 'can't,' I will not."

The words lost their harsh determination from the winning way in which they were said, and a deeper softness in the eyes Gilbert Venner had correctly enough called velvety.

Arthur Challoner was not different from many another middle-aged man of strong common-sense and pretty wide experience; against both experience and common-sense he let beauty and charm persuade him. So far Emily would have been the better Mentor; there was no fear of her letting the matter drop. Challoner only said,—

"Well, I can't make you out, but I can't help trusting you. I hope no one is driving you on."

"By which you mean a woman, of course. No; I give you my honour, no one is driving me on," answered Erls court. "But understand, Arthur, I won't have a word from Emily about this. I'll try and come as usual if she will let all sign of disagreement drop."

"You must overlook any unintentional failure, Leigh," said Challoner. "You young people are apt to be exacting. Remember how fond Emily is of you. You must see how this matter looks, to her especially."

"I want to see old Mentor tremendously myself," said Erls court, taking the slight reproach in very good part. "I am willing to give more than I take. Will you tell Dora that I am going to Christie's to-morrow, if she likes to come, will she join me there at three. She said she wanted to go."

"I'll tell her," said Challoner, understanding the message as a dismissal of the subject. He was not very well satisfied with his share in the conversation when he came to think it over in his chambers. He had not said all he meant to say, and had let himself be, to a great extent, glammed. But there was no

help for it; so re-open the subject was impossible. Well as Erlscourt had behaved, Challoner could see he would not endure anything further. The lawyer felt he had done out of his business what he never did in it—bangled!

CHAPTER XXI.

WHEN Dora Maine received Erlscourt's message from her cousin she said she would go, and pursed up her lips with a satisfied nod of her little head.

"You don't want me, Emily, I suppose?" she said.

"No, dear, pray go. I daresay you will be amused. I was thinking that I might as well make my visit to Mrs. Mordaunt tomorrow afternoon instead of the morning. She does not leave London till the evening."

"Who is Mrs. Mordaunt?" asked Emily's husband, looking up from the raciest novel he had been able to find.

"An old school friend, living not far from Leigh. I thought," said Emily, who had heard the particulars of her husband's conversation with Leigh while dressing for dinner, "then Leigh might take Dora back with him, and I'd join them there."

"Oh!" cried Dora, clapping her hands, "and have a lovely bachelor tea! Mr. Greville told me the harum-scarum way they have things."

"It's a very good plan," said Challoner. "Dora, you had better take a cab down to Piccadilly, and you won't have to wait, Leigh is sure to be waiting for you."

And indeed when Dora, in a charming summer costume, stood up to descend from her hansom, she found Erlscourt on the pavement, assisting her to alight.

"I remember your saying once," he said, as he led her inside the famous Christie's, "that you would like to see a sale here. To-day's a curious old cup I want."

"It's very good of you," said Dora, with that refreshing air of delight. "How extravagant you are, spending your money like that."

"Well, I earn it, don't I?"

"People mayn't spend their money just as they like," said the girl, sententially. "Oh, what a crowd! Who was that nodded to you just now?"

"That was —" mentioning a well-known sculptor. "There's — and —" running over the names of several famous people, and with a smile and bow to some one who passed.

"What a lot you know!" said Dora. "I mean a lot of people. Oh, Leigh!" she exclaimed, suddenly, "do you see that lady a little way off? She's the prettiest dressed woman here—and how perfectly she's standing!"

Erlscourt turned with no particular interest till he singled out the lady mentioned. Then his dark eyes lighted up.

Dora said, eagerly,—

"Doesn't she look charming? She's a somebody, I'm sure."

"She's Mrs. Herbert," said the painter. "I can't leave you, Dora, and I must speak to her. Come and be introduced."

"I should like to know her very much," said the girl, simply, with an intuitive sense that quiet speech was better than any asseverations.

Violet Herbert stood back from the crowd, her face half-turned away from the two approaching her.

She was dressed in black velvet, and a white, rather wide brimmed hat.

The dark dress made her look exquisitely fair, and the lace fichu knotted carefully on her bosom added to the picturesqueness of her appearance.

She turned suddenly, just as Erlscourt and Dora came up.

"You here?" said Erlscourt, taking her hand.

She felt how closely he pressed it as her eyes went to Dora with a sort of proud shrinking in them. Erlscourt said:—

"Miss Maine—Mrs. Herbert."

Dora bowed smilingly—Violet more slightly, a little frigidly, with a faint colour coming into her cheek—whether for Erlscourt or her Dora could not decide.

"I want some vases for my drawing-room," said Mrs. Herbert. "I have not been here ten minutes."

"I've never been here before," said Dora. "Doesn't it look nice and busy—such a crowd?"

"I am just as much a stranger as you, Miss Maine!" said Violet. "I'm afraid I can't penetrate into that crowd, so you mustn't let me hamper you."

"I'll take care of you," said Erlscourt; and Dora said earnestly, in the same breath,—

"Oh, do come, Mrs. Herbert!"

"When were you afraid of crowds?" whispered Erlscourt, bending down to Violet as he drew her hand on his arm, while Dora went to her other side.

Violet gave him a look, half reproachful, but the reproach melted altogether into a smile, and her eyes fell.

When the business began Erlscourt left them, undertaking Violet's business as well as his own.

Dora was delighted to be left alone with Mrs. Herbert, who had taken by storm her enthusiastic girl's fancy, not the less because Miss Dora was more than ever confirmed in her idea that there was a love-story.

Violet, conquering her proud disinclination to keep aloof where she imagined she was ill thought of, began in her sweet way,—

"I have heard your name very often, Miss Maine. You see, you know friends of mine—Mr. Erlscourt and Mr. Greville."

"Does Leigh talk to you about me?" said the girl, smiling. "I suppose you know, then, that this is my first season in London. I do wish I lived here always!"

"Perhaps you may, some day," said Violet, without any particular meaning; but the colour in the girl's face showed her that Dora had attributed a meaning to her.

"Oh, no," the latter said, hastily, "my father lives in the country. He's a squire in Gloucestershire. I shall go back there when my cousins leave town in the long vacation."

"You will not miss London then," said Mrs. Herbert. "It is dull, nothing going on, and all your friends away. And the country is delightful in autumn!"

"Not in winter, though," said Dora. "Though we are not far from the country town, and we have balls there sometimes."

So they chatted pleasantly, Violet, on her side, liking the fresh, lively young girl, who looked as if she had never had a care, and who, if she had heard anything against herself, gave not so much as a look to show it, and seemed as pleased as if she had been gossiping with Her Gracious Majesty.

After what seemed to one, at least, a long absence, Erlscourt came back, having secured the very cup and vases wanted.

"And that's for you, Dora," he said, giving her something wrapped in the most tempting tissue paper.

"What is it?" she said, with sparkling eyes.

"Isn't that always what all the children say?" said Violet, laughing. "Why don't you open it, Miss Maine, you can't exist in ignorance till you get home."

Dora undid carefully the flimsy wrapping, at least enough to show that the gift was a small, quaint, old-fashioned cup. She looked up.

"Oh, Leigh!" she said, "what a lovely little cup! I'll love you for ever for that."

"That's a reward worth having," he said; "but I think I was sure of that before."

They thought of going now. Dora had already told Erlscourt of the arrangement suggested by Emily, and he had agreed to it cordially; whether he felt so cordial about it as

they walked along Piccadilly and Violet said she was going up Park-lane is a question.

He could not but think that if Dora had not been with him he would have had nearly another hour of Elysium, but he bore his ill-fate heroically, and tried not to think Piccadilly, lying in the full warmth of the sun, looked blank and dreary.

As soon as they reached — street Erlscourt consigned Dora to the maid, asked if Mrs. Challoner was there, and was told no. Dora, who had been very silent the greater part of the way, in spite of her new treasure, came down into the drawing-room to find it empty, the tea equipage on a small side table, the breeze waiting itself contentedly through the wide windows, and the scent of flowers coming from the garden outside.

Dora stood sniffing in the warm air and delicious scents, and looking at the quivering leaves of the trees before her, but thinking deeply and apparently doubtfully.

Emily had not yet come, might not yet while; it was in the memory of man that she had been unpunctual.

The girl turned swiftly from the window, passed through the room, and out into the passage, then up the wide, low stairway, pausing at the studio door. It was half open. She heard Erlscourt's mellow tenor voice singing softly, and she pushed the door further.

"Leigh, may I come in?" she asked.

He threw the door wide open.

"Of course, sweetest of visitors. I am sorry you have been alone. I was coming down in a minute. Where's Emmie?"

"She isn't here yet," said Dora, in a nervous way. "I am glad you didn't treat me in guest fashion."

"Dora, dear!" said Erlscourt, putting his hand on her shoulder and looking down into a flushed, shy face, "you mustn't be afraid of saying anything to me."

"It's partly about Emily," said the girl, grateful to him. "She's got a stupid idea in her head," she went on stumbling over her words, "about you and me, and it's all nonsense, and it's making disagreeables between you—and—and—" she had got that out without meaning to, and turned scarlet, stopping dead.

"My dearest child," said Erlscourt, gently, "I know exactly what you mean. I'm sorry you're troubled; but I could not very well say anything to you, and Emmie would not have heeded me. As to disagreeables, that has been settled and explained."

"Oh, I am so glad," breathed the girl. "Oh, don't think me horrid, but I couldn't bear it any longer, and I began to be terrified lest you might think I could have stopped Emily and didn't."

"It never crossed me once—it never could have done with you. It might with some girls, but not with you, and especially seeing as I did."

"Are you quite sure?" asked Dora, venturing to look up into his face, and ignoring the last sentence. "Please speak the exact truth!"

"It is the exact truth, Dora."

"You see," said the girl, "I know I might speak to you—more particularly after to-day—because you couldn't possibly have any idea of such a thing—"

"After to-day, pretty one?"

"Please forgive me," said the girl, almost in a whisper; "I always thought Emily tried that because of Mrs. Herbert."

Vague as her speech was, Erlscourt of course understood her.

"I know she did," he said, so quietly that it startled Dora, and he lifted his hand from her shoulder.

"Leigh, I oughtn't to have said that."

"You can say what you like, Dora," he answered. "You see, all the success Emmie has had is to make you unhappy, me uneasy, and Greville half angry with me. I am very glad you have been brave enough to speak to me frankly; you need not have been so afraid. Now that you have spoken, and we understand

each other, Emily's manoeuvres may be allowed to go on. Except one thing, I don't think she ought to treat Greville as she does."

"She may do as she likes in her own house," said Dora, with unwonted partisanship.

"Well, anyhow, she ought to remember he is my friend," said Erls court, with a smile that made her colour again. "And now, Dora, about your meeting Mrs. Herbert, you must tell Emily or not, as you like. It will make no difference to me. I was sure you had no prejudice, and of course it need go no further."

"I wish it could," said the girl, "I think she is delicious. I always wanted to meet her. But she didn't say a word when we left her. Why does Emily dislike her?"

"Quite a reasonable person to Emily," said Leigh, who could not restrain that bitterness. "I am so sorry," said the girl, sorrowfully. "Perhaps one day—"

He put his arm round her, kissing her.

"You are the sweetest little sympathiser," he said. "I don't know about the 'one day,' but if your life is bright, I wouldn't darken it with my troubles."

"Ah, do you call that friendship? I couldn't be quite happy unless you were. I wish Emily could see her, she would know then that you could not help loving her. I think I will tell Emmie; it is best, and I am under her charge. Besides," with a naughty lift of her head, "she's no right to think me wrong."

"You're a thorough-going advocate, Dora," said Erls court, half laughing, "and the dearest. I think I hear Emmie—"

"Leigh, one word; you are not letting Emily come between you, are you? There is a difficulty, isn't there?"

"Yes, but not of my making, nor Violet's. It is that that comes between us—never Emmie. I should not notice, nor let Violet notice, any such prejudice. Wait a minute, don't run away just yet. I want to know what made you so certain after to-day? Is it fellow-feeling?"

"Oh, Leigh, don't tease me. No; but when you were gone, and I was talking about you, her face looked so soft—that sort of unexpressed smile about the mouth—don't you know it?"

His had very much the same look as he answered her.

"Yes, I am glad you have told me. Now let us go down."

He was down first, and Dora, as she sprang the last step, saw him throw his arms round Emily with a bright "My dear old Mamma!"

"My own boy!" said Emily, kissing him again and again.

They all went into the drawing-room. Dora, relieved of the oppression that had been more or less heavy during the afternoon, insisted on pouring out the tea, and made a merry, as well as a pretty, dispenser of that priceless beverage. But Erls court, though he rattled any nonsense that came into his head, was fretted intolerably by the fact, of which he was conscious, that his sister was constantly scanning him; he would much rather she had spoken. But no; she was mindful of her husband's injunction, and said not a word of admonition, but as Violet Herbert and King's Club were exclusively in her mind the result was silence, and a watching meant to be unnoticed.

She aggravated the situation by saying when she was leaving, "I am glad to see you looking so well," in a tone which prompted Erls court to answer, "Why should I not?"

She waived a reply by asking how soon he could come to dinner.

"Not before Sunday."

"But we dine early on Sundays, so that any one who likes can go to church."

"I'll come in the afternoon, then, if that will do."

Emily accepted this, but looked dissatisfied. She thought a week day evening spent at her house would keep him from the club, which

idea Erls court, divining, was prompted by a spirit of opposition to frustrate by declining to state that he could have come in the following week.

"May I bring Greville?" he said, carelessly; "the poor fellow has nowhere to go on Sunday unless I'm at home, and then he comes in here. You ought to try and keep him out of mischief."

"I am afraid he will find it dull," said Emily, hesitating.

"No, he won't. I'll keep you alive, and perhaps he'll go to church if you let him come, and if he's at home he'll only raise himself in cigarette."

He knew his power over Emily, even when she was displeased, and he also knew she could not resist the bait he threw out, though Greville's party would no doubt entirely depend on Dora's. Emily of course consented, and went down the garden to the gate, while Dora lingered behind to give her sister and abettor a very eloquent look out of her blue eyes.

Greville, half an hour afterwards, was startled by Erls court coming into his room and sweeping away the paper on which he was outlining a head, and then demanding as he seated himself on the table—

"Do you want to be in the seventh heaven?"

"Like St. Paul?" said Greville, irreverently.

"Who else is to be in this heaven?"

"Be quiet, Greville, don't be ill-tempered," said the other laughing. "Will you come with me on Sunday to Hamilton terrace?"

"But, Leigh, I haven't been there for some time. I can't go if your sister is going to snub me—I beg your pardon."

"You need not. She said she'd be glad to see you."

"You asked her, Leigh?"

"Yes, I did, and if you're wise you won't let the chance slip. I tell you what, Greville, you're a lucky fellow to have won Dora. She's a jewel fit for any man to wear—nay, too good for you or anyone else," said Erls court, becoming suddenly earnest. "If you doubt whether she is won find it out, and don't lose this opportunity. No one here has a right to interfere."

"Erls court, how can I thank you?" said Greville. "It isn't every man placed as you are would trouble himself about another fellow's love affairs."

"What, not for an old chum, and a dear little thing like Dora? I'd give years to see you two happy!" said Erls court, with more intense earnestness than before. "You must come on Sunday, at least you'll be with her. Now give me a cigarette and show me that head."

He took it up.

"Ah, I thought so, it's got a look of Dora."

CHAPTER XXII.

Erls court had taken care to call at Gilbert Verner's chambers; as arranged for on his first visit to King's Club; and Verner's revenge had left that personage on the whole the gainer. After that the painter dropped in at the club when he liked; without a word being said as to his becoming a member. Verner undertook to teach him bacarat, but when Erls court declined, laughingly. He said he didn't like the game, implying that it was too dangerous a game for him, and concealing to convey a compliment to Verner's superior skill.

This flattered Verner, the more so as he was quite convinced that Erls court had taken a liking to him. He said so to George King, who had also made the painter's acquaintance, and both were agreed that their new acquisition was no better than the rest at King's, which was exactly what Erls court had taken pains to make them think.

The club seemed to prosper. The authorities did not appear to take any notice of it, though the policemen on their beat sometimes

lingered opposite the windows, but nothing came of it.

It was rumoured in the club one night that a warning had been received—somebody said King had been seen speaking to a man who was a detective; this rumour was rather confirmed by it getting about that lower stakes were to be played for, and for a few nights most of the men left before dawn, which was considered early hours for King's.

Erls court had been present that night, not playing, but looking on, and so, perhaps, had seen still more than usual—and he was always watchful. Verner, who, as he often was, was dealer at bacarat, had seemed uneasy—once or twice significant glances had passed between him and King, uneasy by any but the man whose whole interest it was to learn every secret contained in those four walls.

Verner had also played without attention, and as Erls court had already discovered he was apt to do when disturbed, taken more wine than usual. That was before he had been many times to the club.

Conjecturing, then, that King and Verner were more closely connected in some way than they seemed to the general public, Erls court set himself to make friends with King. That was not difficult with a man of George's stamp and class.

He ventured once to ask Mr. Erls court to honour him by having a cigarette in his private room, and Mr. Erls court consented. As they went upstairs the painter took especial notice of the way, not with any distinct plan, but considering that in his position all the knowledge he could pick up was useful.

The room was the same in which Verner had been when discussing with George the idea of getting the two artists into his clutches, and while Erls court smilingly accepted the cigarette offered him, his keen dark eyes were noting every object in the room, the position of every article and the small door on one side.

George brought out wine, and while putting glasses on the table, swept away angrily some pieces of a torn envelope lying in his way. They fluttered on the floor, save one or two which lay on the edge of the table, towards which edge George pushed a bottle of claret and a glass, saying—

"I know you're little enough of a wine drinker, Mr. Erls court, but perhaps you'd do us the honour to take a glass with me."

Mr. King's lips were not always very certain, sometimes being a little too strong and sometimes not strong enough.

Erls court thought of that with a curious compound of disgust and half contemptuous amusement, as he poured out the wine, and his eyes fell on one of the little scraps of paper that had refused the ignominy of descending to the floor.

"Gilbert Verner, Esq.," seemed to fill the whole bit of white. Then Verner also came to this private room; nothing in that, though—and yet, to Erls court's mind, it made a significant link, a something connected with those significant looks he had seen downstairs. Besides, a man does not tear up and scatter about his letters in a place where he is not familiar.

George had been taking wine downstairs—he now emptied a glass and filled another before Erls court had half finished his; and in consequence became talkative. Erls court praised the wine, which was really good.

"Yes, I'm a pretty good judge," said George.

"I don't let just everybody have that wine."

"I ought to feel very flattered then," said the painter, with infinite scorn in his heart. "I shouldn't have thought," he went on, carefully, "from the make of this house that these second-floor rooms were so convenient. But I wonder you didn't have folding doors instead of that small door."

"Very likely," said George, with a knowing leer, not quite clear-headed; "that little door didn't cost me half what a big one would."

"No, but it would make the room as useful," said Erls court, again at a venture.



["OH, LEIGH!" DORA SAID, "WHAT A LOVELY LITTLE CUP! I'LL LOVE YOU FOR EVER FOR THAT!"]

"What do I care for *en suite*?" said George, on whose lips the French words were not easily recognisable. "It's just as handy to me as it is."

"Naturally," thought the painter, "since I'm very much mistaken if you want anything else but a ready means of escape." Then he changed the subject, and presently rose to go.

Inch by inch, here a little, there a little, that seemed scarcely of moment, and yet might serve him one day—and meanwhile there was little to give him any comfort in a life terribly tried.

Even Violet's loving eyes and sweet voice were little solace—the bitter struggle, never quite lulled, was always hardest in her presence—always the old cry of rebellion, always the unbidden thought to take her away from this endless degradation and forget it, and the more he saw of the man she had once loved, once given herself to, the more he knew of the dishonoured, vicious nature, the deeper and stronger his temptation grew. For such base brute as that her life and his were to be wrecked.

His one real solace at this darkest period of his life was the art that he had always loved with the same pure and exalted love, and now it paid him back in his need.

One night before the Sunday engaged to Emily, one of those exquisite summer nights when one cannot talk but only dream, he paused on the steps of the place he had grown to hate. From within he heard loud voices, unrefined laughter, the clink of glasses; above, the fathomless depths of the blue sky and a soft clear moon. There vice, coarseness, pollution, fever of heart and soul; here, purity, peace, loveliness. What a pitiful change from this to that! Was it so pitiful? Was there not another side—patience, devotion, loyal self-restraint, noblest struggle against sin even of thought? Something of that rushed into the man's heart, softened the tense lips, shone in the dark eyes. He went in.

The card room, as usual, was blazing with light that almost dazzled him, and full of talking and laughter.

The theatres were just out, and before Erlscourt had been five minutes in the room other men kept dropping in.

More wine was called for, fresh packs of cards supplied, baccarat apparently being the favourite game—naturally, in a proprietary club.

"How do, Erlscourt? Glad to see you, my prince of painters!" called some men, familiarly, whose hands Erlscourt in other circumstances would never willingly have touched.

He returned the greetings cordially, declining to play.

"Not just yet," he said, smiling. "What, Venner! baccarat again?" crossing to the table where that gentleman sat, and shaking hands with him and others he knew.

He was a favourite, the more so because his play was so indifferent.

Venner gave a significant look to one of his partners, a look not unnoticed by Erlscourt, who smiled inwardly.

He, too, utterly despised his associates to be wounded in the slightest degree by their opinion of him.

"Try your hand," said Venner, encouragingly.

He had been out to dinner—a men's dinner-party—and, apparently having had quite as much wine as was good for him, kept refilling his glass.

"Perhaps I will," said Erlscourt, watching him, "but not just yet. I'd rather look on a little."

He seemed not to fix his attention on any one player; indeed, he moved away from the table once or twice to others. Yet that did not prevent him from noticing King come up to Venner's side.

Erlscourt sauntered back again.

George asked his friend if he could change

him a half sovereign, but, as the money was passing, dropped his purse.

In stooping for it, he whispered something to Venner, whose somewhat flushed face became for an instant angry, and meanwhile Erlscourt was very intently watching the play.

"Now, Erlscourt," said Venner, after half an hour's interval, "we've finished that game. I wish you'd join us, there's a good fellow?" bringing his hand—a strong, heavy hand—down on the other's shoulder.

Erlscourt did not even wince, though the blood in his veins was like fire.

"I shouldn't like to hamper you," he said, moving quietly aside, so as to release himself from Venner's hand.

"Oh, nonsense; you'll soon pick it up. Indeed, there's nothing much in it to learn."

Erlscourt sat down, his mind busy with thoughts quite apart from the game he was learning.

He had told Violet that Venner was fond of wine, but he had never yet seen him affected by it further than the inducing of high spirits—certainly not while playing.

He was still cautious now, never missing a chance, and it was in vain that Erlscourt looked for any sign of unfair play.

Venner was wise enough to run no risks, until the baccarat was over, and Erlscourt suggested *courti*.

"With all my heart," said Venner, with alacrity. "I owe you your revenge."

The other men had left them, gone to the smoking or billiard-room, or to take further refreshment.

(To be continued.)

A "NAR" is the passing rest of a school teacher who is just far enough "gone" to appear deceitful, and wide awake enough to catch the smart boy who thinks all things are what they seem.



["AND SO YOU DID NOT HAVE YOUR FORTUNE TOLD," SIR GUY SAID, SUDDENLY, TO ANNABEL.]

NOVELETTE.]

HALF SISTERS.

—O—

CHAPTER I.

A man, full, untrained voice was making the air ring with the lilt of an old ditty:—

"Oh! the gipsy's life is full and free,
A gipsy's life for me!"

"All werry well for he to bawl. He got nothink to do, he ain't, 'cept twist that ere throat about so as to mek folks stare, and the wenches stand gaping 's'if all he sings about was true," muttered a sulky, dark-skinned lad, who was stripping a chicken, his last petty theft, preparatory to immersing it into a seething cauldron, already pretty full of odds-and-ends of savoury meat and herbs.

By the side of the big pond at the far end of a secluded Hampshire village the gipsies had pitched their vagrant tent. The encampment was a favourite one with them, and they well understood the rest and likelihood of good cheer they were in for.

People about here were kind-hearted and unsuspicious; small pigs and stray lambs were procurable at slight risk, and fowls and ducks were in plenty for the mere catching. As for eggs, they were a glut in the free market of these open-hearted and light-fingered marauders.

The fully-rigged tents looked picturesque enough in the gradually fading light of the peaceful summer evening, and some harassed souls might even envy the swarthy happy-go-lucky figures that loitered and lounged in the appetising odour of the cooking-pan as it simmered under their nostrils, with its promise of succulent contentment yet a little later.

They were apparently without a care, and once more the rich voice startled the stillness with the refrain:—

"Oh! the gipsy's life is full and free,
A gipsy's life for me.
The men are brave—the women are true,
A gipsy's life for me!"

"Shet up yer row," growled a full-whiskered, elderly man; "there ain't nobody 'bout Willow-lane to night as wants it."

"All right. I say, young un, chuck in that cocky lorum, or he'll be underdone at the finish, and poultry ain't dainty half raw."

The lad made no answer, but did as he was bidden, nevertheless. Very dexterously he did it, so as not to scald his fingers. He was well used to his work.

One or two lean, scraggy horses of venerable age stood by looking wisely, as such creatures do, at the occupation of their betters.

The man who possessed the singing voice lounged up to them, and taking their shaggy manes led them deliberately into a field of fresh young clover.

"Now kip well to the sides, old 'uns," he said, with a kindly pat on the high-boned haunches. "Looks poor, they do," he remarked in a general sort of way; "as if they was fed on butter tubs, and the hoop irons was shovin' through."

As the hissing steam lifted the cover, "Whiner," the queerest type of rough bulldog one ever saw, gravely placed himself further away from the cauldron. He was patient, knowing quite well that his share of the meal was assured. With almost human intelligence he looked round for somebody else to notice that the lid required moving, and an old crane hobbled forward to inspect the situation, whereupon Whiner sniffed hungrily. Well he knew the flavour of fowl bones, both grilled and boiled.

"Hist."

Whiner pricked up his ears—at least he effected that operation with the one that remained to him whole, for the other was but the remnant of an ear, but he moved not from his

position. He only listened as if slightly bored that anything was likely to hinder the evening meal.

"Hist, I say!"

A very handsome woman, with sparkling black eyes and jetty hair that hung in plaits to her waist, beckoned to the man leaning against the gate of the clover field.

He went forward and followed the direction of her eyes, which were now dancing with mischief. What they saw was two slight girlish figures entering the lane in the direction of the village. Their dainty pink gingham dresses and large shady hats made a charming picture against the evening sky, now flecked with amber and purple streaks.

"At 'em, good dog," said the woman in coaxing tones to Whiner, who growled menacingly as her words were enforced by a slight kick.

With a despairing sniff of disappointment towards the pot he started off, well aware that what loomed ahead was—business.

The two exceedingly pretty girls in the pink gingham were terrified at his approach, and the shorter one clung in selfish fear to the younger, but evidently the stronger-minded of the two.

Whiner commenced operations by attaching their small King Charles spaniel, at which, and his cries of distress, the girl screamed afresh.

"Poor Fido! He will be killed, Annabel, and you stand like a stone! Help, help!"

"Oh, thank you. Thank you," was continued, gaspingly, as the handsome gipsy woman came up and called off Whiner, who was quite content to give up such feeble prey, and return to the encampment.

"You are quite safe, my pretty dears!" said the woman, in a sweet, low voice, "and the poor little dawg," taking up the unresisting Fido, "is not hurt a bit, though Whiner is a bit rough at times I'll own. Now, if it had been a cat," laughing till all her gleaming

teeth flashed in the pale light, "I'd not have answered for its life."

A shudder shook the pretty trembler, as she took her silken-haired pet from the woman's arms.

"How dreadful," she gasped, "to have a dog like that!"

"He suits us, you see, little lady; and now shall I tell your fortune?"

"Yes, pray do! Oh, how lucky, after all, Annabel said Netta, with sudden and abrupt change of manner. She was interested and alert, and all her fear was gone.

"Surely, Netta," came in unsympathetic tones from Annabel's lips, "you will do nothing so silly! We are already late; let us hurry home."

Netta, pretty, spoiled, wilful Netta, pouted.

"Indeed, I shall not," she said, in defiant tones. "You can go home if you choose. I dare say you are quite mean enough to leave me to pass those horrid gips—" Here she blushed and hesitated.

The woman laughed, and once more showed her even white teeth.

"She won't go, dear little lady; but you need not fear passing us all the same. I'll see you by for that matter. Even now as we stand here there is somebody in trouble about you."

"He is—he is!" cried Netta, impulsively. "You see," she said, to her companion, "she knows, or how could she speak the truth like this!"

"How long another will woo you—for already he thinks of you by day and dreams of you by night. He is tall and dark, and, tracing some lines in the pink palms," he will be some day very rich indeed. You are fond of money and good living and fine clothes. You will have it all in plenty if you act cautiously now, but," went on the dulcet voice, "I must cross your hand with silver, pretty one."

In a moment Netta's purse, a well-worn one of plain leather, was out, and a shilling put in the gipsy's hand, while the tall Annabel looked on disapprovingly.

"How absurd!" she said. "Hold your tongue, do," said Netta, exasperated at her coldness. "Cannot you hear she is telling me true?"

She was violently agitated, and her wilful temper would not permit her to listen to caution. Her curiosity burned like a torch within her. She must know more.

"Go on, go on!" she panted. "Do not mind her. She is only jealous."

Annabel's fair face flushed the colour of the reddest of roses, and she indignantly walked on, leaving the two together.

For some time they stood in close proximity, and it was not till Netta discovered that Annabel was out of sight, that her purse was once more ransacked, when she dashed away in pursuit. She dared not remain alone.

"It is mean of you," she panted, as she overtook her just past the encampment; "and you know how frightened I am at gipsies and of the dark."

"Then you should not be so weak and silly."

"You are only angry at what I said; and, after all, it doesn't matter a scrap, and you are always making me say things so—by your stupid, proud, unfeeling ways. Why should one not have one's fortune told, pray?"

"As if it is any use!" said Annabel, in her grave, irritatingly superior manner. "We all know it is nonsense, and I am not at all sure it is not wicked."

Netta clapped her hands and laughed gleefully.

"Merry me. How good we are!" she cried, joyously.

Her nature was light, gay, volatile, and eminently selfish. Her moods were quick and variable, so that nothing troubled her long. It was easy to laugh, and on occasions not at all difficult to cry; for Netta Wilding, young as she was and country bred, had

already by a cunning wit picked up a few of the world's first lessons. She knew the value of tears when all else failed.

The two daughters of a plain, tolerably well-to-do farmer, were half-sisters, the children of one father; so it is to be presumed it was the difference in the maternal blood that made their natures so entirely distinct, for Annabel in every respect was the opposite to Netta. Where the one was self-seeking and false the other was truthful and true.

Where Netta would scheme and intrigue for ever so small a personal end, Annabel would stand calmly aloof, unless some desired end came to her in the natural course of events.

Where one was vain, the other was proud. Netta was distinctly the reverse of the two in a superficial, half-hearted way. She was prettier, too; and, as she considered, the most fascinating.

She had a subtle knack of raillery, that, her object being gained, never failed her in putting the slower Annabel in an untenable position; and she never spared her merry wit, which, foolish though it was, served her turn well in making her appear innocent of guile, while placing others at a discount.

Annabel felt this, but was powerless to refute it and turn the tables upon her enemy, except by a dogged resentment that to the onlooker placed her at a disadvantage.

"Look," said Netta, who, to do her justice, never held malice long; "how lovely this night is! The gipsies make quite a picture. How the flames leap up into the night, and," musingly, "how still the night is!"

"And how late!" said Annabel, scarcely stopping to look at the weird, peaceful scene to which Netta pointed.

It was nearly dark now, and the flaming fire of the gipsy encampment cast a strange flickering radiance on the wide pond, the low fields, and the darkening copse which belted in some swelling hills in the distance.

"Oh, dear!" sighed impatient, sentimental Netta, "how prosaic you are, and how dimly tiring with your sense of what is right and what is wrong. I hate right; it's too tiring for anything."

They were in the wide porch of Park Farm, and yet again the mercurial mood in pretty, selfish Netta Wilding changed, and her tone became pleading.

"I say, Annabel, you will not tell about the fortune-telling. You know how ridiculously pigheaded dad is about it. And in return I'll do you a good turn some day when I am—"

"Mistress of States Marine," answered Annabel.

Netta stamped her foot upon the clean-paved brick entrance, for it was so precisely what she had almost said, and what, in her ambitious foolish breast she, wins her talk with the gipsy, well-nigh counted upon as sure.

Annabel was looking with a straight, direct gaze down the homely garden path, through which they had approached the house.

The tall hollyhocks looked like spectral ghosts in the oncoming moonlight, and the mist was slowly rising on the lower lands and choking the sound of the croaking of many frogs.

"It will rain soon," she said, rather irrelevantly, as she wiped her feet carefully on the cocoa-nut mat.

"Bother," snapped Netta. "And who cares a pin whether it rains or shines in this out-of-the-way hole? You are as cold as ice, and just as prim and disagreeable as you can be. I would not be your lover for something!"

"No," said Annabel, slowly smiling, till in the evening gloom she appeared strangely beautiful; "but I would far rather be prim and disagreeable than so ridiculously vain and silly and conceited as you are!"

"Hey-day, gels; you snaggins again, and it's about time you were in bed! What, not had supper yet! What's it all about, eh?"

It was Farmer Wilding's voice, and Netta sprang upon his neck with a sweet impetuosity which effectually checked further grumbling.

"In bed," she pouted, "on such a night as

this. And," sanely, "pray where have you been if it comes to that?"

The easy-tempered father laughed at this sally, for it was "Netta's way," and its brightness pleased and tickled his fancy.

"We stayed so long at Aunt Anna's," Netta went on glibly, "that we forgot the time, and had to run nearly all the way home."

"Hamp! Well, get along in now, or we shall have mother scolding us all the way round."

"After you, Miss Ernde," whispered Netta, seeing a look of disgust on the pure, fair face.

Entering the comfortable living room, they encountered the full brist of Mrs. Wilding's thin querulous voice, for she was holding forth on some vexed subject; but Netta hung defiantly on her father's arm, and met her eyes nonchalantly, which angered her the more.

"So you are with your father," she said, in vinegary tones, "so I suppose it is all right, and I must not say a word as to the propriety of two young girls tramping the fields after dark."

"Don't be hard on the ladies, mother; we were all young ones," said Farmer Wilding, putting his child away from him and taking his seat at the plentifully spread board.

"Young!" snarled Mrs. Wilding, with a peculiar intensity, for it was a sore subject with her that she had been well advanced in years before she became the third wife of old Wilding.

Then eyeing the two children of his former wives, she commenced in what she considered a satirical manner.

"Perhaps you will be good enough to take off your things, and allow supper to be served. Ah, of course, all the starch is out of your clean dresses!"

Netta looked rueful at this, for it cut home. Dresses were not so easy to get of late at Park Corner. A talk of hard times had set in, which militated against too frequent visits to the draper's shop in the market town.

Mrs. Wilding's gimlet eyes spied out such details with irritating quickness, and both girls felt crushed, as they suddenly realised what the treacherous evening damp had done for their pretty costumes.

Farmer Wilding was very silent during this petty sparring, as was his wont. His idea was a crude old-fashioned one, in the main, that women must have all the talk. He had married a capable, managing wife, and it was but natural she should hold her own.

There was one more inmate of the room to whom, over Mrs. Wilding's shoulder, Netta pulled a comical grimace.

This was a farming pupil of Mr. Wilding, Frank Olivart, a good-looking, sandy-haired young fellow of twenty or thereabouts.

"I've told Shuffler to look well round to-night, sir," said he, bristling in on the troubled waters, and so hoping to shield the delinquents from further storm, "for there's some gipsies camped up in Willow Lane."

Shuffler was "old man" about Park Farm.

"The deuce there is!" said Mr. Wilding.

"You must keep an eye on your feathered stock, mother!"

"I don't see anything to laugh at," was that lady's rejoinder, "when, if you remember I lost fourteen young ducks at one go only a month since. These tramps are a disgrace to a Christian country. They ought to be put down by law."

"Ay, ay!" assented her husband, "but the law's past my comprehending. It frightens me," he laughed jolly, "that it wants something to keep that in order. As for the gipsies, I expect they'd be mortally offended at being called tramps, eh, Frank?"

"They ain't far short of it, sir," said he of the sandy hair, as he handed Annabel another slice of fresh, home-cured ham; "they're mostly a bad lot!"

CHAPTER II.

"You gels see anything of 'em?" asked the farmer.

"Oh, yes!" chimed in Netta, seeing that Annabel was not going to help her out; "and a nasty horrid dog flew at darling Fido. We were so frightened. How we ran, to be sure! Poor Fido was nearly mad."

Here Frank Olivant nearly choked with suppressed laughter, for he began to see how matters stood. Mrs. Wilding looked sharply from one to the other, pursed up her thin lips, and coughed till Netta would like to have shaken her. She was angry, too with Annabel, who went on eating her supper as calmly as Charlotte might have cut bread-and-butter while Werther pleaded his love case.

"All I can say is," went on Mrs. Wilding, "that things are coming to a pretty pass when farmers' daughters can go out and stay away for five or six hours at a stretch, and better making day too. 'Thank goodness!' preening a capricious, which young Olivant could not help thinking she little needed, out of a shilling pickle bottle. 'I am strong myself, and able to work. It is a good thing that I was not petted in my youth, to grow up into useless, fine ladyism. To be sure I miss being able to play the piano,' smiling grimly at her own joke.

Netta was red-hot with temper by this time, and a retort was only prevented by the thin, harsh voice going on again.

"If you had run fast before you met the gipsies instead of afterwards, my dear, I think it would have been more to the purpose."

"Now how much does the spiteful old cat know?" was Netta's inward comment, while Frank Olivant, still looking perplexedly at Annabel, was making much about the same calculation.

But, to everybody's relief, the subject was dropped by the farmer rising from the table—the usual signal in the primitive household that the cloth may be cleared.

It was characteristic of the two girls that Netta should perch her pretty self on a stool at her father's feet, and sit in charming idleness, while Annabel gravely helped Molly, the red-armed serving maid, to put aside the crusts and fold the delicately clean, if somewhat coarse, tablecloth.

To be sure Netta was, in a sort, a visitor from time to time in her father's home, as generally she lived with Uncle Tom at the other side of the village.

And so, by her clever deftness, she contrived in both households to maintain her position as something different to a regular inmate, on whom regular duties depended. It suited her to be petted as a doll in Uncle Tom's childless home, and to be tolerated at Park Farm as a guest instead of taking up troublesome honours as an elder daughter of the house. The honours in this case were not worth the sacrifice in her opinion. Annabel was more than welcome to them, such as they were.

An hour later Annabel, kneeling beside the freshly smelling tent-bed, with its lavender-scented curtains and sheets, heaved a hasty exclamation from Netta.

"Good gracious me! Oh! Annabel—"

As Annabel does not move Netta waits impatiently, and tears are rushing from her excited eyes when they at last meet those of her sister.

"Oh, Annabel! don't get into bed, I'm in such trouble. I've given that gipsy creature my sovereign instead of a shilling. What shall I do?"

The depth of such a calamity startled Annabel out of her calm.

"How could you be so careless?" she asked, aghast.

"I don't know," almost sobbed poor Netta, rummaging yet again in the old leather purse.

"It's gone."

"You ought never to carry about a whole sovereign at a time in your pocket," said Annabel, still standing in shocked surprise, and willing to commiserate, but unable from sheer force of habit to help blaming Netta.

"It's no use to argue," sobbed Netta.

"What can I do to get it back? Oh, that nasty, horrid, ugly wretch!"

"I thought you considered her so handsome?" said Annabel, lapsing into her usual self again, and resentful of the other's selfish woe.

"How can you get into bed," cried Netta, angrily, "when I am in such trouble—how dare you?" and she stamped her naked foot on the ground till it smarted again.

"Whatever is the use of staying out of bed?" inquired Annabel. "It will not help you to get it back or prevent your hearing of it from mother over and over again till we are sick to death of it."

"She shan't know of it," said Netta.

"She must know of it," argued Annabel, willing to discuss the matter, for she was not ill-natured, and such a real tangible trouble aroused her sympathy. "You see on Tuesday, market day, we are to buy our new hats!"

"She shan't, though," drying up her tears, "because I shall ask Frank Olivant to give me another—"

"Netta!" almost shrieked poor Annabel, sitting up in righteous horror.

"Good gracious me!" snapped Netta, her eyes ablaze with petty fury at having been so unguarded, "I shall only tell him all about it, and, of course, what can he do but give me another? He is rich, as we all know; a sovereign is nothing to him—just nothing."

"But how can you take it?" asked Annabel. "Have you no pride? What is Frank Olivant to you that you can tell him such a thing, and then demean yourself to take money from him? I am ashamed of you."

And she looked it.

"And pray, what is he to you?" asked Netta, rudely.

"Nothing at all," was the quiet answer. "Only I don't want, having to live in the same house with him, to be ashamed to look him in the face."

"Don't be such a gaby, and get over your own side, do!" as Netta proceeded to prepare for her own rest. "You needn't say any more about it, and I'll never tell you anything again."

"You can ask Uncle Tom."

"Bother Uncle Tom! Yes," apparently considering the proposition, "I can ask Uncle Tom. Good-night."

Annabel could not sleep. The events of the evening had been too exciting, and Netta's proposition to calmly ask Frank Olivant for money staggered her so that, do what she would, she could not rest.

"Netta," she whispered, some time afterwards, "are you asleep?"

"Nearly," was the mumbled response, for Netta's trouble was already passing.

"I have thought of a plan, dear. If Uncle Tom can't give you another sovereign you shall have half of mine, and we will have those hats without the feathers, and they are very pretty, you know. Will you promise me not to ask Frank Olivant, but to take my help as I propose?"

"Perhaps I will, dear," said sleepy Netta, quite as if she were conferring some favour on Annabel.

It is a trial, known fortunately to few, to live in a house whose virtual head is of the carping, inconsistent order, whose persistent grievances make the sufferers feel as if their noses were being rubbed on a nutmeg grater.

Such was poor Mrs. Wilding, and just so did the other inmates of Park Farm feel when her grievances were fully ripe and she metaphorically hung them out to air.

Through all the district round she had the character of being the best housekeeper—she had not lived at "States Martin" twenty-five years for nothing—the most energetic manager, the most successful poultry breeder, and so on. Her butter, her bacon, her fruit obtained the prizes in the local shows, and caused honours to be awarded to her in the weekly markets.

All this tended to flatter her inordinate vanity, and rendered her civil, nay, even

courteous, to outsiders through whom the pleasurable balm was tendered; so that only those under her immediate home sway smarted under her yoke or were fully exposed to the sharp edges of her hamper.

This was all the more difficult to deal with, since in common justice they could not deny her cleverness, nor shut their eyes to her undoubted industry, her thrift and her economy.

Strangely good points these when the wail of hard times echoes along the outposts.

Annabel, in a quixotic, girlish way, realised that under the irritating disagreeable exterior there lurked a certain goodness, and this ensured her respect; so that, however much she suffered, she rarely permitted speech to escape her unless she could put in some palating word.

She could not be said to love her step-mother, but she was just.

For years past Molly and Sara—the two strapping buxom serving-maids—had determined at times that they could not stay and put up with missus's ways; but in those days notices of removal were not so easily given as now, and, perhaps, they stood on, and perhaps on the whole were wise in their generation.

They both could call to mind generous deeds to themselves, and to the kind, of which they were not forgetful. And again, neither Molly nor Sara could face the thought of leaving poor dear Miss Annabel to bear the burden alone—they well knew their honest sympathy and help counted for a great deal with her.

Of Netta they thought little. "As for she, poor, crazy-brained thing," said Sara to Molly, "she thinks plenty for herself to spare other folks the trouble."

The morning following Netta's experience with the gipsy in Willow-lane a smart young fellow swung himself through it, followed by three or four handsome dogs.

He carried a hunting-crop, and with it boyishly swished off the tops of the long grasses and the heads of sundry proud fox-gloves.

As he neared Park Farm he threw aside a half-smoked cigar, and smiled curiously as he glanced round and about, as if to spot one person in especial.

Apparently he was disappointed, and proceeded towards the house through the tall, stately hollyhocks at a leisurely pace, that bespoke him exceedingly well at home in his whereabouts.

"Hello, Mrs. Wilding! busy, as usual?"

"Lo! Sir Gay!" said that lady. "How you do startle one, to be sure! You ain't a bit altered; and fancy you catching me like this!"

"And what matters?" he asked, gallantly. "Pictures must be dusted, I suppose, and why should you not stand on a chair to do it, since your own laches fail you? All the same," he laughed, "you never would let me stand on chairs in the old days, when you tyrannised over me until my life was a burden!"

"Ah, Sir Gay, but, then, what chairs you would choose to ride roughshod over—your poor mother's best tapestry, indeed!"

"Here's a note from the old lady, what I've strolled over for," was his next careless remark; and once more his gaze wandered inquiringly around, as if this errand was not his only idea in getting himself so far as Park Farm.

"Bless me, Sir Gay! how you do put things," said Mrs. Wilding, standing before the son of her late mistress as he sat astride of the chair she had vacated. "Now, Lady Martin, as a matter of fact, is only two years older than me; and, somehow, I'm always so busy that I lose count of time, and forget how I'm ageing."

"Ah, but you see my poor, dear mother is so fat—the outcome of her idleness; I tell her. Now, you keep your figure. A woman should always keep her figure, Mrs. Wilding, and then she can defy age itself."

Mrs. Wilding involuntarily drew up her flat-chest, and was at once in her best mood.

"What is this new trouble she speaks of, Sir Guy?" looking up from the note she is reading.

He laughed again.

"Nothing less than the new railway we are all agog about," he answered; "and she is particularly irate that you, of all people, are encouraging it by having one of the young engineers to board with you. By-the-bye, is it true?"

"So Wilding says," was the answer, slowly given. "It seems that years and years ago he knew something of this young Standing's father, and that's quite enough for Wilding, you see, Sir Guy. It's no earthly use for me to set against it once he sets his mind upon it. I've put it all before him, but see it he won't. He's very easy going is Wilding, up to a certain point, but beyond that—well, even you, as a young lad, wasn't more stubborn."

"All what have you put before him?" inquired Sir Guy, with a curious twist of his full lips.

"Well, Sir Guy, for one thing, it will not be pleasant for me to feel there is no spare bedroom in the house."

"And another thing?" still with the slow smile that, somehow, made his face so unpleasant.

Mrs. Wilding looked at him in silence.

"Come, Mrs. Wilding," he said "you are a sensible woman! You are thinking about his girls, and quite right too. By-the-bye, is young Olivant on the square?"

"Oh, there's no danger of Frank Olivant, Sir Guy, no danger at all; but who knows what this fashionable young engineer may be? But, as I say, it's Wilding's business, not mine. I am not the mother of his girls. As for that poor silly, shallow-pated Netta, I tremble for her! Annabel is sensible!"

"And will be a very beautiful woman some day, Mrs. W."

"Sir Guy!" in some astonishment.

"Ay, she will; not yet, but by-and-by. You mark my words, when Netta is a round about little matron, with half-a-dozen children at her apron strings, Annabel Wilding will be a beauty."

CHAPTER III.

SIR GUY MARTIN left Mrs. Wilding rather abruptly after ascertaining she would obey the behest in his mother's letter to come up to States Martin in the afternoon.

His far-reaching eyesight had discerned two girlish forms rounding the stackyard, each carrying a basket, suggestive of eggs and poultry feeding.

His dogs leaped on in front of him, madly rushing to pay their canine *devoirs* where apparently they were due.

"Down, Metaphor, down!" cried Netta, in affected, shy alarm, holding her basket of freshly-gathered eggs as high above her head as she possibly could. "Oh! Sir Guy, do call them off! If we smash these treasures we shall be in for a tremendous row. The home temperature is very unsettled!"

Annabel accepted his greeting with no such merry fooling, but sedately, as was her wont. She blushed hotly, 'tis true, but that was at remembrance of the gipsy encounter of the previous evening, and of what the woman had predicted for her sister Netta—for Netta, who apparently took every word for gospel truth, and was prepared to act, in consequence, a still more foolish part than usual.

And how dazlingly pretty she looked in the sweet, warm morning stillness! Her rounded cheeks were flushed with Sol's bright glances, till they resembled nothing so much as ripe peaches waiting to be plucked. And her saucy eyes challenged Sir Guy's with, as Annabel thought, hotly, unmaidenly openness.

They still wore the pink gingham dresses that suited their fairness so well, for Mrs. Wilding had sharply allowed that now they were far too disgracefully soiled for afternoons, and that they had better finish out the week with them as morning wear.

"You are almost as busy, Miss Annabel, as I found your redoubtable mamma-in-law, or stepmother, isn't it? Not quite the same thing, now I come to think of it," said Sir Guy, laughing.

"Nasty old cat!" interpolated Netta. "I hate her!"

"Hush, hush! Miss Wilding. I dare listen to no treason; and young ladies who have matriculated at the head boarding-school in Southampton should not give way to such forcible expressions."

"I'll be bound you did when you had to put up with her at States Martin," said Netta, mutinously.

"That was altogether different, Miss Netta. She was not my stepmamma, you see, and I never called her a cat!"

"What did you call her then?" asked Netta, wickedly.

"Mrs. Griffiths—which was her title by courtesy, spinster though she was. In public, and behind the scenes, she went by the sobriquet of The Ferret!"

"Exactly so," said Netta, "and a very good sobriquet too. I shall adopt it!"

"Nay, nay, little one; 'tis not fitting for your dainty mouth to speak of such vermin. Cat comes much more trippingly from the bawdy tongue within your cherry lips!"

Netta pouted. She did not quite relish this style of half-mocking badinage before Annabel, who stood listening with a purely disdainful air.

They were all leaning idly on the stackyard-gate, and the cheery sounds of busy, regular farm life made a pleasant soothing music that was certainly not conducive to any feeling but pure indulgence of that sense known as *dolce far niente*.

Netta pettishly swung her sun bonnet over the gate, wilfully inviting some tiny pigs on the other side to compete for its possession. And still Sir Guy talked quietly to Annabel.

"Are you courting sunstrokes, Miss Wilding?" he asked presently, carefully displacing the ash from his cigar.

"No," was the answer, given sullenly, for her merry humour was under a cloud.

He smiled, failing to catch her eye. "And so you did not have your fortune told last night?" he said, suddenly, to Annabel.

Both girls perceptibly started. "Ah!" he laughed. "I saw you, and perhaps I heard all about it!"

The ear on the near side of Netta's curly head burned scarlet, but she did not look round.

"At any rate," said Annabel, coolly, "you heard no ridiculous nonsense about me, for I walked on and left them."

"Yes; you were a veritable Miss Peaseley!"

At which Netta giggled, and her good humour partially returned; but something had offended her, and she was not altogether appeased.

"Why," she was thinking, "should he dare to talk to Annabel, and to turn me into ridicule before her, when behind her back he calls her a prude and all manner of things? I hate her, and I hate him!"

But here the hot tears scorched the blue-eyeballs, for she knew she was telling herself an untruth; for, alas! so much as she knew of love was given unreservedly to this cool, mocking man, who stood carelessly chaffing with them at their father's gate, and wasting the time that should honestly have been given to active indoor employment, to say nothing of the music practising, which were such a source of ire to Mrs. Wilding, who considered, sensibly enough, perhaps, that all such spyry was out of place for a working farmer's family. She was certainly very old-fashioned in her ideas, and had a most disagreeable way of respecting class and class.

"Let me see your hand, Miss Annabel! I am somewhat of a palmist. Have been reading up the thing lately. I daresay I could give you already far more reliable information than the gipsy did Miss Netta, and—I will not charge you anything, for my science does

not require the hand to be crossed with silver."

"Or with gold!" said Annabel, quickly, and then she bit her lip hard, having said more than she intended.

"I mean," she went on, noticing Netta's angry countenance, "that poor Netta had a great misfortune, and gave some gold in mistake for silver. It is a misfortune," she said, simply. "One should not carry gold about."

"Now," said Sir Guy, "do not let it trouble you. By Jove! that woman shall give up her ill-gotten gains, or I will know the reason why."

"Can you make her, really?" asked Annabel and Netta almost in one breath.

"Of course I can," he answered, "if I like to take the trouble, and I will in this case. You see I was an eyewitness to the interview—heard something of it, as it happens," here Netta blushed furiously again, "and I watched till I saw that little fool Fido was out of danger. I did not give him to Miss Netta for him to be gobbled and shaken by a stray mongrel like that fellow they call Whiner. They are only in the next village, and I will ride over and get back that—sovereign or half-sovereign, was it?"

"A whole sovereign!" broke in Netta, excited at the thought of recouping her loss. "The nasty thing must have known."

"Oh, well, they have a wholesome horror of exposure. Fortune-telling is illegal, you know, young ladies, so I warn you. If you require the cash before I can get it from her allow me—"

"Oh, no!" cried Annabel, with flashing eyes, "we can wait."

"All right," removing his hand from his pocket. "How particular we are. I wish everyone were so, and I should be so much the richer."

"Neither a borrower nor a lender be," quoted Annabel, pleasantly.

She, too, was glad to see a prospect of Netta's ill-fortune being honourably staved over without ultimate loss.

"Miss Annabel Wilding," said Sir Guy, with irrepressible amusement, "you should really have a tub in the market-place to air your rather far-fetched ideas, in the hope of doing some good to the present ill-conditioned generation. So far as this lending and borrowing is concerned, I fear we are all more or less heavily dipped in iniquity."

"But it is dishonest," said Annabel, stubbornly.

"Not necessarily," Sir Guy was not a trifle nettled. "It is mostly a matter of pure accommodation, as it would have been had I advanced you this sovereign," holding out one, "and repaid myself with one taken from that thievish gipsy. It is merely a matter of time in this case; and let me tell you Miss Honesty Straightlace, that had you required the immediate use of the money you would have been very stupid indeed not to have taken it. Besides, now I come to think of it, I wish Miss Netta to take this sovereign instead of my getting her the one straight from that dirty gipsy's pocket. It may even be tainted with some loathsome disease—one does hear of such things. As for me, I shall, after taking it, chuck it straight into some shopkeeper's hands instead of risking carrying it about my own person."

Netta hesitated to take the coin, although her pretty eyes looked greedily at its tempting brightness. Annabel was staggered by his reasoning, and so stood mute.

She hardly knew that, as he had put it, she would not have taken it now. Of course, as he said, he would get it back again for the asking, or else what was the use of his being a J.P.

Here one of the small pigs got hold of the lower frill of Annabel's dress, and vigorously commenced trying to pull it through the gate, so that her attention was distracted.

"Take it Netta, and don't be such an arrant little fool," said Sir Guy, in a low, hard voice, "or you will make me really angry!"

For a moment her eyes meet his, and some-

thing makes her gaze falter, while he laughs loudly at the antics of the disappointed pig, for by this time the pink frills are released from his grasp.

"I am waiting to see your hand, Miss Annabel?" leaning his broad back on the gate.

Mechanically the pink palm was held out, but Netta saw nothing to be amused at in the eager way in which it was taken and studied.

"These lines," pointing to some upright creases on the upper part, "are—"

"Just nothing at all," snapped Netta, rudely. Her weak, jealous temper overcame her utterly, and she nearly cried.

"Oh, oh! easy now; they show me a great deal. There is a stranger coming into your life, Miss Annabel—"

"Oh! it is all the same old rigmarole," said Annabel. "I thought you were going to read my character, not tell my fortune. I do not believe in that, but in chiromancy and phrenology there must be something."

"Are you interested in the science?" he asked, quite gravely. "I firmly believe in it myself, and have been reading 'Lavater,' the greatest authority known on the subject. If you think you can tackle him I will send down the book."

"Oh, thank you!" said Annabel, her whole face glistening with pleasure, "thank you very much indeed."

Netta's brow was getting more and more lowering, and unable to bear this fire of cross-purposes. She was not a well-bred little girl, you see, despite the Southampton boarding-school. She deliberately turned her back on the two, and proceeded with quick steps towards the house.

CHAPTER IV.

SHE tore her dress skirts passionately from some clinging currant bushes as she wended her way indignantly without once glancing back.

Her rich under-lip was severely bitten; her heart was hot and restless with foolish, unreasoning jealousy, and the pretty, childish eyes were full of tears.

She saw nothing of the beauty of the sunshiny morning, heard nothing of the birds' sweet songs, felt nothing of the hush of peace in the murmuring hum of insects in the summer laden air.

The jar of her own feelings overmastered her, and she was blind to everything that should have healed her trouble. Such troubles are very sore—let none dispute it—and poor little Nella Wilding's nature was thoroughly undisciplined, selfish, and intolerant withal, so that she could ill brook defeat—and defeat of a sort was hard upon her just then by reason of her weakness.

In a word, she lacked the *optomb* which the world only gives to women to combat on equal terms with such a man as Sir Guy.

"Why should he hurt me so?" was her bitter reasoning. She did not know the cruel lesson that such as he "love to afflict."

The front gardens of Park Farm were of the sweet, old-fashioned sort that so well fit the solitary homesteads, of which this was the truest type.

Half flower borders, half herb borders, half fancy fruit-bushes outlined by trim box edges; the whole interlaced with wire fences, on which creepers and roses bloomed in their regular and appointed turns. The paths which wound in and out amongst it all were of softest grass, well-kept and broad.

A cool brick pathway ran the whole length, dividing this garden from the low-thatched house, and this Netta had barely reached when Annabel, having walked very quickly, overtook her.

"Netta, you are to go back and say good-bye to Sir Guy."

"Indeed I shall not!"

"Very well. At least, I have delivered his message. He is waiting."

"Let him wait," but hesitating palpably, "just as long as he likes. I don't care."

"I daresay," said Annabel, rather provokingly, it must be confessed, "he will survive even that in the gaieties of town. He goes by the early coach to-morrow."

Poor Netta was startled out of all seeming by this unlooked for intelligence, and crying, "Oh, do take my basket!" flew back through the box edges and tall hollyhocks to where Sir Guy still stood by the stackyard gate.

"Well?" was his only greeting.

She stood before him—a startled, repentant flushed little figure, her chest heaving with repressed sobs, and the bright eyes flooded with moisture.

"Desperately pretty, by Jove!" was his inward comment. "Like a partridge at bay, and about as helpless."

"How well passion, to say nothing of jealousy, becomes you, little one!" said he, at last. "And now what is it all about—this tempest in a teapot?"

She could not command her voice to answer him, but dashed away her tears and smiled into his eyes, deprecating their coldness. She half-put out her tiny hand, but he did not choose to see it, although had he taken it the spot they were in was secluded enough.

He was a handsome man, after a certain style, and this is saying much, for the style was not inviting as to trust or general goodness of heart. There was a mocking cynicism in his manner at times that reflected itself on his countenance so that it was repellant. It was so now, and Netta Wilding weakly shuddered.

"How can you be so cruel to me?" she asked, in low, shaky tones, finding silence too painful to be borne.

"Cruel, child," he said, hurriedly, through his set teeth. "It is you who are silly—a silly, childish little idiot."

Netta instead of being offended was hugely flattered, and swift blushes flushed her fairness into renewed beauty under his critical examination.

"Why do you look at me so?" she asked, uncomfortably.

"Because, silly one, you are fairer than most of the daughters of men. Have I not told you as much hundreds of times, and yet you flout me? It is I who ought to be jealous, if it comes to that."

She slid her hand into his, and the light of gratified vanity irradiated her like a halo. She preened herself in the sunlight of his doubtful praise as a peacock might have done his glories of covering to an adoring sun which shone on all alike, but on none so glittering as he.

She glanced up with a pleading craving in her regard, which in turn flattered the man's soul into something very near akin to a nobler passion than he had yet experienced, but anon he laughed. Nothing noble long had place with him, and he quoted:—

"Child—Man is the hunter; woman is his game, The sleek and shining creatures of the chase; We hunt them for the beauty of their skins; They love us for it, and—we ride them down!"

"Comprenez vous?" he asked, looking greedily at her.

"I don't know," came uneasily from her trembling lips. "I want to talk sensibly."

"Do you indeed? Since when, may I ask?"

"I have been so miserable."

"No, really?"

Shallow and frivolous as the girl was she was earnest here. In a way she had been miserable, was miserable still. Her heart was filled with a multitude of complex feeling she could not in the least understand. She was, above all, hungry for this man's love—for his honest love. Had she it? she vaguely asked, and echo gave her no response.

What was love? she wondered as she looked fixedly at her tormentor who could thus rend her heart in twain, and smile into her questioning eyes the while.

It is a question which older women than she have so often asked in vain.

Suddenly he grasped the small, trembling hands, with a touch she knew full well—with a touch that thrilled her to the core, and she faintly realized some truth in his words that she was a silly little idiot.

Perhaps, after all, it was she who was to blame. Ah! the pity of such soft-souled reasoning, but under the glamour of temptation who can forcibly combat it?

A momentary strength, born of something good and true within her, gave her power to withdraw her hands from his, and to draw up her small rounded figure with a dignity very foreign to its usual coquettish abandon.

A dark shade crossed his face—so far above her own, for young Sir Guy Martin was a very tall man, and Netta only stood five feet in her shoes. Perchance in that moment he may have experienced some feeling of regret for the ignoble part he was playing. Who knows?

But her next words killed it. Sir Guy had never denied his fancy a thing in his life, and it scarcely behoved him to be quixotic now when such tempting fruit dangled within his reach.

"Sir Guy! oh, Guy! you are not going away—to leave me without a good-bye!"

"Unless you so will it, child—no!"

A quivering sigh was Netta Wilding's only answer.

"Why," she asked, affecting some of her ordinary coquettish petulance, "do you tease me so by talking to Annabel?"

"So that is the trouble, eh?"

"You know it is," not attempting dignity now.

"I wanted to see by her hand whether this young engineer that is coming has to do with her life or yours, only you always jump to wrong conclusions, like the silly which you know you are. Tell me what you know or have heard about him?"

"Netta, half pleased and half scornful, pretended to look thoughtful, and puckered up her low forehead, till Sir Guy laughed again.

"Nothing," came the answer. "Only that dad used to know something of his father long ago; and that is why he is going to take him to live with us instead of putting him up at the Martin Arms."

"A very good change for him, I should say."

"He seems to think so—he wants stabling for two horses and a tub."

"Oh!" still laughing, "he don't belong to the great unwashed, then? A pretty good sort of fellow, I should say."

"Of course mother is making herself cantankerous," and Netta laughed shyly.

"She is a wise woman, and scents trouble in the dove's foot. Let me tell you she is in this case near about right, little one. Mind what you are about, that's all, or you will have me to reckon with. Mrs. Wilding—"

"The ferret!" corrected Netta demurely. Her good humour was quite restored by now.

"Is coming up to the house this afternoon."

"And I am going back to Uncle Tom's," said Netta, with a quick, upward glance.

"Exactly so; and you will find the walk through Atherley Woods pleasanter than the road, eh?"

"You are not going away?" asked the girl, eagerly, as he opened the gate to depart on his homeward way. "I mean, you are not leaving home to-morrow?"

"I am; but only for a few days. I shall tell a certain little woman all about it if I find her walking in Atherley Woods at three o'clock this afternoon. By-bye!"

He went leisurely off, lighting another cigar, his dogs obediently following his footsteps, and Netta waited for one backward glance in vain.

But now she was not unhappy, and could sing lightly as she went once more through the heavy-leaved currant bushes and box edges.

"Love is come with a song and a smile,
Welcome love with a smile and a song,
Love can stay but a little while.
Why cannot he stay? They call him away;
Ye do him a wrong, ye do him a wrong;
Love will stay for a whole life long."

And then, leaning against the wide brown-wooded old porch, Netta went into so much of a thoughtful reverie as her volatile nature ever permitted.

Shading her sunny eyes with her hand, she gazed across the open fields that lay before her father's house—beyond them to a line of dark copse bordering Atherley Wood—past this again to where some imposing chimneys broke the sky line, States Martin.

And a gleeful smile crossed the pretty face, and the plump hands were clasped together in a mute ecstasy. He loved her, and it was not the first time such as he had married one of what the world called low degree.

In all her favourite books the heroes did so, and why not her hero, handsome Sir Guy, of States Martin?

"Ye do him a wrong," (ran in her ears)
"Love will stay for a whole life long."

CHAPTER V.

At dinner Netta's face was a study in facial development, had Mrs. Wilding only known it, when that lady announced that if she went back to her uncle's that day she could not have the gig, but must walk.

"Already," thought that astute little fellow, "the gipsy's prophecy begins to work."

"I can walk quite well, mother, if Shuffler can bring over my box by-and-by."

"Yes; and you needn't go early, so as to get tired and hot. After I am gone you and Annabel can help Molly pick gooseberries. Of course, by going to Homelands—Uncle Tom's house—you will slip out of helping in making the jam."

Mrs. Wilding read Netta and all her little selfishnesses correctly, and never spared her the knowledge that she did so.

"I daresay Aunt Susan will be making some," said Netta, willing to make petty conversation, for her heart was singing blithely within her. Pick gooseberries! Not she, when Atherley Wood waited for her, and her lover would be there.

"As if you did not hear me read her note this morning that she was beforehand with me, and had finished the gooseberries! And you also know that all fruit ripens quicker by a few days at Homelands than it does here; but that is not my fault," with a sour sort of apology that if she could have arranged it differently it might have been done better.

"You are very clever, Netta, and I daresay when cherry and strawberry time comes you will dodge your visitings quite as well, but you don't seem to be picking to-day; and mind, Annabel, that I find them all neatly topped and tailed ready for the step-pins at eight to-morrow morning."

"She'll have her work well cut out," thought idle Netta, mischievously, knowing full well that there would be no help of hers given in the picking or topping and tailing of the fruit in question.

Eating the preserve farther on would be quite another pair of shoes, and Netta was exceedingly sweet-toothed, and was, her step-mother always declared, woefully extravagant with jam.

Frank Olivant offers to drive the light cart over with her box after her return from Southampton, and Netta carelessly accepts, so that is settled.

Evidently the handsome gipsy was right in saying that her way to riches and grandeur was to be smoothed for her.

Another smile crossed her face later on when she wonders how Sir Guy is going to be in Atherley Wood, and at the next village to get her sovereign back from the gipsy at the same time.

All the same she need not worry about that. She is not the loser, and some day all his sovereigns will be hers by right. She almost hummed one of her new songs aloud:

"Some day, some day, I know not when or how,
But some day I shall see him—"

"Netta," said Mrs. Wilding, severely, "we don't want any singing or mumbling at table. You seem very frisky all of a sudden!"

"Never mind, mother!" broke in the farmer, who loved to see all young things gay and lighthearted; "let her be. Old age and troubles'll come soon enough."

At two o'clock precisely Mrs. Wilding started in high feather for States Martin. This expedition was with her always an imposing ceremony. She drove herself in her husband's roomy gig, and the mare had on her new harness.

As she disappeared through the stableyard to the road gate Netta made certain facial grimaces that very much amused Mr. Frank Olivant—for Mrs. Wilding, although he stood in great awe of her, was no favourite of his. He always breathed freer when she was out of the house, that is, if he were in it, and vice versa.

"Shall I help you two with the gooseberry picking?" asked the young fellow kindly, and blushing violently under his sandy locks.

"If you like you may," said Annabel; "but I thought you were going to Southampton?"

"Not till four o'clock, Miss Annabel, and we can get heaps of gooseberries picked by that time. As to the top and tailing I don't know what that is."

"Oh! you'll learn that along with other items of farming, etc., all in good time," laughed the girl pleasantly, for she and Frank Olivant were always good friends and on pleasant terms.

"It's picking off the horrid little brown tuffy noes and the beastly little green tails that stain your finger nails, so that nothing short of lemon juice or ammonia gets them clean again," said Netta, merrily. "Catch me top and tailing gooseberries."

They all accepted this statement in perfect good faith, for Netta's tricks were well known. Annabel had never thought for a moment that she intended to help, and so was all the more pleased to accept Frank Olivant's proffered aid.

The sturdy young fellow marched away forthwith to get the open wicker fruit baskets, so that they might begin at once, and so ease Annabel's labours as much as might be.

With them he brought over his arm a large garden hat, and as she sat it under her chin he noticed how delicate and white her slender, long-fingered hands were.

The girls were fibrous-shaped and cut to perfection, for, despite much useful work, Annabel was particularly dainty in all such feminine niceties.

"I'll bring you back some ammonia, Miss Annabel. It's lanky I am going into town, and I can get a few lemons too."

"You had better stick to the ammonia, Mr. Olivant," said Netta, who was disposed to flirt and chatter with him as better than nobody till the time came for her to depart, "because carrying lemons on horseback is difficult; they will bulge your pockets out, and make you look as if you had hip disease."

"Well, I haven't," he said, rather sulkily, for he did not quite like being chaffed, "and I don't mind looking a bit lanky, if it comes to that, so that Miss Annabel can get her pretty nails clean. Fruit does play the devil with staining things."

He was hard at work by this time picking the hairy red Warringtons with a vengeance. The basket promised fullness in no time. Annabel, too, was deftly filling hers, so that already the bottom of it was fairly covered.

As for Netta, she was swinging herself on one arm, and with the other hand was selecting only the very finest specimens of fruit, and these she transmitted not to the basket, but to her mouth.

"Oh, dear!" she said, presently, "how hot it is, and I must be going in to get ready. I haven't packed yet," which was a fib, for she had hastily bundled her belongings together before dinner, and only had to cram in the dress she was taking off.

"All right!" said Annabel, from underneath a rare old gooseberry tree.

"And if I don't see you again," she cried back over her shoulder—she had no intention of doing so—"I will say good-bye."

"Good-bye—good-bye!" came from both the busy fruit pickers, and man carrying Netta was free.

She danced along the brick pavement with lightsome steps, through the porch and up the dim old stairs into their white, daintily trimmed bed-chamber, where stood her small open trunk, and on the tent bedstead a clean, blue-specked muslin, which was to replace the pink gingham now so tumbled and soiled.

It was the work of a few minutes to pull off the soiled gingham and deposit it in the trunk, which she carelessly shut, leaving the cord beside it. Somebody else could adjust that, presumably Frank Olivant, since she was going to undertake its conveyance to Homelands.

She briskly laved her face in clear cold water, and smoothed the soft brown hair, and adjusted the natty straw hat at the precise angle that suited her arch face. The blue muslin became her well, and she started with no more good-byes for Atherley Woods.

As she passed through Willow Lane she peeped the remains of the gipsy encampment—the little patches of ashes all that is left of the glancing fires which had so luridly lit up the evening gloom the night of the fortune-telling escapade.

She wonders where they are now, and smiles as she remembers that Sir Guy prefers having her company this afternoon to going to the next village for that wretched sovereign.

"How delightful it must be to be rich!" she sighed.

"How I shall revel in it!" she sighed. Doubtless her feeling under such circumstances might be nearly akin to that of some humble artisans who, coming into a fine legacy unexpectedly, were so elated that to show their appreciation each of the family bought a watch for Sundays and a watch for everyday wear.

The thought of riches was simply intoxicating to this village beauty, to whom a sovereign was now a large sum. She had visions of untold grandeur in the word wealth, and saw herself mistress of fairy-like castles; that, though reared in air, seemed to her bright fancy not insecure of foundation.

She laughed aloud as she spied a heap of fowl bones, and saw feathers of speckled hue under the near hedge.

"Some of the old cat's children," she said aloud, in a gleeful voice. "So the gipsies did have them—for one I am very glad. I hope they enjoyed them!"

She tripped onwards with happy face, and singing stray snatches of her many songs, all of more or less a sentimental character. Her voice was full and very pretty to listen to, being tolerably true.

She ran short races with Fido, exciting him to madness, at which she herself laughed with delight, all presently she bethought herself of her coming dignity, and walked more gravely.

"My lady," she said to herself, "my lady! And then I shall never wear frumpy old gowns like his mother does. I shall always have peach-coloured silks and satins and laces; and if I wear muslins and cottons, when they will be trimmed with embroideries like those Madame Lucy makes for the Castle people."

Here she looked with blighting disdain at the simple frock of pink, speckled muslin with which not so long ago she had been fully content.

And they would travel about a great deal, for Sir Guy had once told her that when he was married he should travel, so as not to be much at States Martin while the old lady lived.

Now Netta felt in a generous mood as she

stepped quickly over the mossy road towards the copse. She did not at all wish the old lady to die, for she should enjoy travelling so much, especially as she pictured the state in which it would be her lot to travel as "my lady!"

And, in all probability, she would have to be presented at Court. This thought completely staggered her with its glories. How should she manage a train three yards long?

And how should she ever bow, as she had heard they did, so low, and yet keeping the body in an almost straight line? She had learned dancing as taught at the academy at Southampton, but the practising of the ordinary courtesies as executed there must be very different to Court bows to Her Majesty.

She was preparing to try one of these bows before a spreading old oak when she was startled by Sir Guy's voice.

"What an earth are you at, little one? and what the devil have you brought that yapping little cur to proclaim our whereabouts to every passer-by for?"

CHAPTER VI.

"Don't abuse him," said Netta, a little abashed, but pleased still, "since you gave him to me."

"Instead of having it more properly disposed of," still a little fretfully. For some reason he was annoyed to have the small animal at their heels today.

"How, Sir Guy?"

"Drowned, of course, as the rest of the litter was."

He had linked his arm carelessly in hers; and was entering the wood by this time—into the darkest and dimmest portion of it, where they had spent so many hours unknown to any living soul but themselves.

Netta was just a trifle quenched by his cool and careless tone, but tried her best to be equal to the occasion.

A sudden quail came over her that his near presence, instead of strengthening her air, made her tremble perilously.

"My lady" did not seem so real to her under his half-mocking air.

"And wherefore so gay to-day?" he asked, seating her beside a purring rivulet and at the foot of a big tree. "Clean frock, new waist-band, best hat?"

"I put it on because you like this blue colour," said she, brightly, "and Annabel had it got up so nicely for me."

"It strikes me, miss, you get Annabel to do a good lot for you. Now tell me why, in fortune's name, she should get up, iron don't they call it, dresses for you? I'll be bound you don't do hers."

"She won't let me," pouting, "because she knows so much better than I do."

He laughed, giving her a careless kiss. "You will have to pick out the richest of your dresses, Miss Netta, for a husband, for you are desperately inclined to be extravagant, let me tell you. Now I wonder if the young engineers is rich—richer than young Oliveira, or as Jabez Stubbs?"

"Don't," said Netta, hurt and angry, "and you are crushing my dress. Let me go."

"Tell me if jealousy of Annabel was the only thing that made my little one sulky this morning?" Netta looked sharply at him; for there was something underneath his tone now which she did not in the least understand.

"Had she nothing else to fret her? Any village gossip, for instance?"

"Ah, well! instead of being fretted it may please you, for ought I know, to say that it will give your village lovers a chance; although I flattered myself you would feel a bit rusty."

Netta leaned over him as he layst her feet in the sweet, mossy grass; and whispered—

"I shall never be vexed at anything, Sir Guy, dear Guy, while you are good and kind to me!"

He drew a hard breath of intense relief—he had heard then. He suddenly pulled

down the pretty pale face to his, and kissed it again and again with a passionate vehemence he had never shown before.

She was frightened, and trembled like a leaf in his arms, murmuring in distressed accents—

"Don't, don't, oh! pray don't, Sir Guy."

"By Jove! Netta, you are a brick!" he said at last. "You have more pluck than I thought you had."

After a fashion she had. His words rang truer than he would have considered it possible.

"What do you mean?" she questioned anxiously. "I cannot understand you to-day."

"I mean what I say, child, that you are more plucky than I thought you were."

"I don't know in the least what you mean."

"Nonsense, little one."

"Please don't tease me any more." She was very near crying now.

"All right, little one," kissing her again. "Let us be sensible and have it out. I thought you would have cut up rough, and treated me to overdoes of virtuous indignation and all that old-fashioned balderdash. After all, you will always know that it is you I love."

Netta's face was pale to ghastliness.

"What is it?" she gasped, moistening her dry lips painfully.

With wide eyes she stared at him—her lover—fixedly, and all the sweetness and goodness of life seemed ebbing away from her in a dark flood.

"Don't be idiotic, child—it is too late to put on mysterious airs. You know there is an old saying somewhere that in the world 'men marry where they do not love, and love where they do not marry.'"

"Yes, go on."

"Well," he said, "between you and me marriage is nowhere—love gets the best of it."

He tried to take her in his arms, but she resisted violently. She was beginning to understand.

"What is it," she asked, nervously, "that you think I have heard? Tell me."

"That, child; about my marriage, of course."

"Your—marriage," came in low, painful accents from the poor, white, quivering lips.

"I never knew—I never heard."

"It was all over the village yesterday. The Castle lot took precious good care of that," with angry vehemence, as he tried over again to entangle her with his arms.

But she sprang aside. The movement did her good, and enabled her to steady her failing pulses, and to control her voice.

"What have I ever done?" she asked, steadily, "that you should insult me so?"

Even Annabel could not have looked more unapproachable or more queenly, and Sir Guy felt that, after all, he had not made a correct reading of Netta Wilding. He certainly had never admired her so much before.

"For once in his life he was cowed, and at a loss for words."

"I see now," went on Netta, "how silly I have been, but," and her eyes flashed fire, "I am not quite the stupid fool you take me for."

"Did you think," stamping her foot resolutely, "that I had no pride?"

He did not answer.

"You are a bad man. It is you who are a silly fool, not me."

"Well done, Pamela," he said, finding his voice all of a sudden. "You are doing it splendidly. By Jove, Miss Wilding, you should go on the stage. Would you like it, Netta?" with startling seriousness. "If so, I will make the way easy for you, and we can be happy yet. Here you are not in your proper element, and we shall be hampered at every turn by the domestic virtues and all the rest of it."

He had risen and stood beside her, and his eyes, too, were shining with excitement as yet again he strove to caress her as of old.

"No," she cried, with fine scorn, "never

again shall you touch me. I hate you. I cannot tell you how much I hate you!"

Her intense and sudden disappointment was giving her strength to defy him. But how long would this fictitious strength hold out?

"You will never be happy with Lady Mariel—never!" she said, scornfully. "She is old and ugly—"

"Oh, come, come, not so bad as that. Most people say she is handsome, although I confess I don't like big women myself, but that is as it may be."

"And I will always pray that your home may be never blessed with joys of any sort, that you may never have an heir to the wide lands of States Martin—that your name may die out, and that you may—"

Here she almost broke down, but his entering voice backed up her failing courage.

"You are doing it splendidly, Miss Wilding. Do not disdain my offer of putting you on the stage. It is decidedly your *métier*."

"I will not be put on the stage or anywhere else by you," drawing up her small figure with consummate pride.

"What shall you do?" he inquired, affecting a blandness he was far from feeling.

For a moment she hesitated, meeting his mocking gaze unflinchingly, and then said—

"I shall marry the first man that asks me!"

"Pooh! Don't be ridiculous."

"I swear that I will do as I say," she answered, stolidly, and Sir Guy Martin saw clearly that if her present mood held out—a mood he had never expected to find in Netta Wilding, hitherto his weak, pliant tool—she would do as she threatened.

"Yes," she went on, her voice grown quite steady now. "You shall never come back here to pity the poor fool, the silly creature, who lived lonely because she once loved you—"

At that moment Sir Guy would have willingly foregone his marriage with the high-born Lady Mariel had it been possible, for he knew that he really and truly loved this lonely horn maiden, who suddenly, under stress of cruel circumstance, proved herself of nobler stuff than he had thought.

The discovery gave him a shock of repulsion that boded ill for the happiness of the future lady of States Martin. Not that Lady Mariel Mountcastle would have cared a jot one way or the other. Her object was simply to be mistress of States Martin, and that was assured.

"And now go—go at once."

As he essayed to take her hand in some sort of farewell reasoning, Netta added furiously—

"Go at once, Sir Guy; or I will scream aloud."

As he picked up his light overcoat from the ground Netta gave it a slight kick, which action struck him like a blow. Never had he felt so poor a creature.

As he turned away he knew in his very heart of hearts that so long as he lived he should love this former's pretty daughter, who had dared to spurn him even with a kick of her arched foot, for now—he respected her.

Poor little vain, frivolous, Netta. She had had a rude awakening from her empty visions of high-flown bliss. She stood as it petrified, gazing at his retreating form till it was lost amid the branching foliage of the trees.

Once more he does not look back. Had he done so, and met that wild despairing gaze, the course of two lives might have been altered and nothing more of this story had remained to be told except the old well-worn formula, "and they married and lived happily ever after."

She fell to the ground with a low cry as he disappeared from view, and she realised that she was left utterly alone.

No one but a woman so cheated and so left, who has by the treachery of a man missed a great happiness, fully knows the meaning of that simple-sounding word—alone.

(To be continued.)

COUSIN MAX.

—o—

THE little shop was closed for the night. People did not buy second hand books enough after dark to pay for gas, the proprietor said, so he was enjoying his own reading in the sitting-room.

It was a small room back of the shop; a poor room, too, where each article of furniture seemed reduced to the last stage of shabbiness, and the old man, reading in the circle of brightness, under the lamp-shade, looked as old, as worn out, as shabby as his surroundings. Suddenly a clear, sweet voice, with the musical ring of youth in its joyous accents, roused him.

"Do I look very nice, grandfather?"

Mr. Denman pushed aside his book, straightened his spectacles, and looked up, a smile on his lips, and a brightness in his eyes that only Millie's voice could bring there.

He saw, standing very erect before him, a quaint little figure in a white muslin dress of a fashion of twenty years before, with straight full skirt, very stiff, and smooth, a low-necked, short-sleeved body, and a little ruffle of lace for its sole trimming. From the soft lace rose shoulders round and white as an infant's, a slender throat, and then a face of such rare loveliness that it was small wonder the answer was an emphatic one.

"You look very nice indeed, my darling! Is this a new dress?"

"No, indeed, grandfather. Do you think I would buy new dresses when there is that great trunk full of mamma's, that fit me now exactly? Mollie says evening dresses are exactly alike, and so I chose this one."

"But—were you going out?"

"Have you forgotten, grandfather, Brenda Leigh asked me to her party? She 'comes out' this evening. We have been such dear friends at school, and I know that she would come here often if you had not forbidden me to ask any one here. But she is very fond of me; and, grandfather, her cousin, Max Melton, is here from Liverpool."

"Indeed! So you are to see your hero?"

"My hero! Oh, no; he quite belongs to Brenda. But she has told me so much about him—how noble he is, and how much good he has done wherever he goes—that I must advise him. And I want to like the husband of my very best friend."

"Oh! her husband, is he?"

"Oh, you dear, forgetful grandfather! Have I not told you before that there is a lot of money, left by an old aunt to Max and Brenda if they are married? If either one refuses, the money all goes to the other."

"Yes, yes; I remember. But this party—you cannot go alone."

"No; Mollie will go with me, and fetch me. She must be ready now." And Millie tied a white hood over her short, brown curls, and wrapped herself in a great blanket shawl.

"Good night, dear grandfather!"

The warmest of kisses pressed the withered lips, and Millie flitted away, happy in the anticipation of her friend's welcome, and the dimly imagined glories of the first party to which, in all the seventeen years of her life, she had ever been invited.

Two hours later, in a large, brilliantly lighted room, filled with guests from the very cream of society, a lady and gentleman stood conversing. The lady, a pretty blonde, attired in the richest white lace over lustrous white satin, was the *débutante* of the evening, Miss Brenda Leigh; and the gentleman, many long years her senior, seemed on terms of intimacy, as he questioned her freely about the guests in the room.

"One forgets even old friends in a long absence," he said, in a leisurely tone that was habitual to him; "and I see many new ones here."

"But you will soon know them all, if you stay with us all winter, Max. There are so many I want you to know and like. There

are the Grayson girls in pink; they are worth a fortune in their own right; and there is Nora Creighton; is she not handsome?—the brunette in crimson velvet. And the tall, fair blonde talking to mamma is the great heiress, Julia Leverett."

"And who," he asked, in his cool, leisurely manner, "is the pretty girl on the sofa, who looks as if she wanted to cry?"

"I dare say she does," said Brenda. "That is one of my school-fellows, Millie Clarke; and I invited her for this evening because we were such fast friends at school; but if I had known she was going to come here looking like that, I would never have asked her. Why, that dress is disgraceful, and she hasn't an ornament!" And Brenda arranged her costly bracelets, and toyed with her earrings, glancing complacently at her own rich dress.

"I see," said Max, gravely.

But when he had strolled through the conservatory with Brenda, and listened to her rapid, giggling speeches some ten minutes longer, he resigned her to a monstrosity dandy, and quietly but persistently worked his way to the sofa where Millie still sat, struggling with her mortification.

Bowing gravely, he said,—

"May I take something of a host's privilege, and introduce myself as Mrs. Leigh's nephew, Max Melton?"

The large, shy, gray eyes that had been fixed upon the carpet pattern were lifted quickly.

"Oh! with a quick drawn breath, "are you Max? I know so much about you!"

"Indeed!"

"Brenda talked so often of her cousin Max," said Millie, blushing brightly, with a sudden fear of having been forward.

"Then, since you know me so well, perhaps you will do me the honour to dance the next waltz with me?"

"I should like it so much, only—only—I think you had better not. I—there was an evident battle here against rising tears—" it is my first party, and I did not know—and there was no one to tell me—and it was a dress of my mother's—she died when she was only nineteen, and I did not think about the fashion. Mollie did it up beautifully for me, and I thought it was nice until I saw the rest. But, you see, there is not one in the room looks as I do."

"Not one," he thought, looking down upon the exquisitely lovely face, and wondering how many of the ladies present would give her jewels and finery in exchange for such rare perfection of beauty. But aloud he said:

"It is quite evident that you do not know that to own an old-fashioned dress nowadays is to attain an enviable distinction."

Yet while he spoke he could see Brenda looking with scorn upon the muslin that she had told her mother was "neither one thing nor the other: not old enough to be æsthetic, but simply out of style."

"Perhaps you do not care for dancing?" Max said, after a patient waiting of some minutes.

"Oh! but I do! And no one has asked me yet. I am sure I can dance, for we all were taught at Madame Despard's; but—but—" The childish lips quivered again, though bravely pressed together.

Guessing something of how deeply Brenda had stung this sensitive nature by her reception, Max dropped into an easy chair close beside the sofa, saying,—

"I imagine we are fellow-sufferers, Miss Denman. I know but very few people here, and have a 'lone, lorn' feeling, even in this crowd. But your name is very familiar to me. One of my dearest friends, a professor in the university where I was educated, was Edward Denman, and his wife was named Lillie."

"My father! my mother!" cried Millie. "Did you know them? I was only a baby when they both died, sixteen years ago."

"I remember. It was the year that I

graduated that Professor Denman died. I did not know that his wife, too—"

"Mamma died first," Millie said, softly; "but there was only one month between."

With this bond between them, the two forgot the gay crowd around them, Millie hungrily listening to the memories her grave companion imparted to her of her father and the young wife Max remembered so well.

It was better for Millie that Mollie came early for her nursing, and the evening had scarcely begun for Brenda's guests when Millie stole away home, all the mortification, the hurt, sore feeling of her reception, forgotten in the keen pleasure of her last hour, in which the grave, middle-aged man had talked to her of her parents.

"He is not at all like the hero I imagined, grandfather," she said, nestling down at the old man's side as she told her experiences. "I had no idea he was so much older than Brenda."

"He must be nearly forty, if he graduated the year your father died, dear!"

"He looks so; but oh! grandfather, he seemed so far above the young men around him. None of them spoke to me, but I could hear them talking to the ladies they were with, and—I don't think I should care, even if I was pretty, to be told so in such broad terms, grandfather. I should be afraid the person who told me thought me silly as well."

"Perhaps he would. And so you are content now, Millie, to give up parties for the future, and never to see your hero again?"

"Quite content. I hope I am not proud or vain, but I don't care to feel so small again as I did last evening, and I think Brenda will not care ever to see me again."

But, although Millie was quite right in this last surmise, there was one of the guests of the important evening who could not drop so easily the recollection of the soft gray eyes that had so frankly met his; the low, sweet voice that asked such eager questions; the slim, graceful figure, so quaintly attired. World worn even beyond his years, Max Melton had spent so many of these in a struggle for fortune that love had seemed to him a far-off, impossible dream. He had drifted into a tacit consent to the terms of his great aunt's will, without giving the subject much consideration until Mrs. Leigh's letter, informing him that Brenda was nineteen and had left school, and inviting him to pay her a visit, suddenly brought him face to face with his future life.

He had won his way from a boyhood of comparative poverty to the possession of ample means, and the money of his deceased great aunt offered no temptation to him.

But into his lonely heart stole visions of a home, a wife, a dear companion to share every thought of his brain, every pleasure of his life.

Young love comes without thought, without preparation, a glad, rosy vision of impossible bliss. But the love of middle life takes reason into counsel, and Max was not a boy to rush into mad dreams.

Yet the sweet hope roused by his aunt's letter came again and again to fill his thoughts, and an ideal of pure, sweet girlhood, of a shy, tender maiden who would trust her happiness to his keeping, was suddenly confronted by a bold, giggling school-girl, who met him as her property, without one impulse of maidenly reserve. Two days of intercourse with Brenda Leigh had quite decided him to return speedily to Liverpool, when at the party given partly in his honour he met Millie.

Had he unconsciously founded his own ideal upon his recollection of his old teacher's wife, he wondered, when Millie so entirely met his dream? Was there yet, in this heartless world, one pure, untouched heart that knew nothing of fashion or glitter, yet was content in obscurity? Something of the child's life he could guess in her conversation, and that little was enough to detain him near to her to learn more.

It was not difficult to introduce himself to Mr. Denman as one of his son's old pupils, and it seemed to the old man as if a stone was lifted from his heart as Max, evening after evening, found his way to the shabby sitting-room behind the book-store, leaving ever with a deeper love for the sweetest little maiden he had ever known, and gathering into his own keeping the first pure, strong love of her young heart.

The winter had passed when Max Melton asked the old bookseller to give him his one treasure.

"You love her, and you are willing to give up your aunt's fortune for her sake?" Mr. Denman asked.

"My aunt's fortune! So you have heard of that. It was all settled months ago. Brenda has the whole, and is engaged to the prettiest little fop who has figured in society this winter. She says my grave face frightens her, and she would think she had married her grandfather if I was her husband."

"And you love my Millie?"

"I love her," was the quiet, grave answer.

"Although her sole wardrobe is the one her mother left sixteen years ago?"

"In spite of that appalling fact!"

"And she loves you. Loves you with her whole heart. I believe I act for the child's happiness when I give my glad consent to her marriage with a man I have learned to respect and love as I respect and love but few. And now I will tell you why Millie's future has weighed heavily upon my heart. I have not neglected her, though she has lived so quietly here with me.

"She has been educated in the best schools, and I knew the polish of fashionable life would come easily to her natural refinement, were it ever needed. But it was not because I should leave her to struggle with poverty that I trembled for her future, but because the fortune you have resigned is not one-fourth of the one Millie will inherit at my death."

"And you live so quietly!"

"So humbly, because I am content in my old home, and I did not want Millie to marry a fortune-hunter. But now," and his hand grasped that of his companion, "I am more than content. Are you sorry you have won a wood-violet who has grown to such sweet perfection in the shade, instead of a flaunting garden tulip?"

But Max answered only by a smile, for at that moment Millie came in, and in his eyes, as they rested on her face, was a proud love, a perfect content, that was better than words.

And if Brenda, fluttering through life like a gaudy butterfly, wonders openly how Millie can forego all those pleasures that her fortune places within her reach, Millie knows where deeper happiness can be found in the quiet charities, the many works of benevolence to which she gives time and money under the guidance of her girlhood's hero, Cousin Max.

A LIFE'S SACRIFICE.

—O—

At sunset, in the month of October, a young man, with a good face, and ragged boots, with clothes covered with the dust of the road and utterly empty pockets, paused at a low stone gate and looked across a green lawn towards the porch of a pretty cottage. In this porch sat a lady in creamy white. At her side stood a boy of four years or more, dressed in a gay little costume of grey cloth, with crimson stockings and polo cap. Near them lay a great bull-dog chained to a post by the door. The man looked, hesitated, opened the gate, and entered.

"Madam—" he began.

"No," said the lady, shaking her head.

"No. Go away immediately."

"She thinks I want to sell something," the man said to himself.

Then he spoke more loudly:

"Madam, I only wanted to ask you if you would be kind enough to give me something to eat. I am really very hungry. I am walking to Sheffield to get work, and I have used up every farthing I had. It would be a great kindness if you could let me have a little food."

This time the lady rose.

"Go away!" she cried briskly. "We allow no tramps here. This dog is dangerous. Come one step nearer and I shall unfasten him. Go away!"

Such a pretty, fairy-like little woman; had she no charity in her soul? It was strange to hear her.

The little boy, too, in his artistic dress, ran down the steps, picked a pebble from the path, and threw it with all his baby might towards the man at the gate. And the great bull-dog growled and strained his chain in a way to prove that he deserved the character given to him. The lady had advanced to the dog, and stood ready to unfasten the chain.

"I give you two minutes!" she said, in her high, sweet young voice. "We make short work with tramps here."

The man answered nothing. He merely turned and hurried out of the gate, and as he went he muttered curses, not loud, but deep. It was under his breath that he said,—

"May you need help and get none," he said, with an oath. "May you need it as I do this night;" but he meant it, every word. Then he sat down and buried his face in his hands. "A tramp!" he repeated. "Heaven knows I told her the truth, and she called me a tramp. And this is a Christian country, and that woman calls herself a Christian lady, no doubt."

From the kitchen of the house the wind blew the appetising smell of coffee to the hungry man; and the odour of some dainty hot cake came with it.

A cup of that coffee and a crust of dry bread would have helped him on his way with a lighter heart.

He had never in his life begged before. He swore he never would again, if he starved on the road. He had worked for good wages since he learned his trade. He liked to read, and had the poetical justice of many a novel treasured in his heart. He had always been to church, and been respectable; and he had never felt it his duty to refuse a beggar what he had to give.

He had not saved for excellent reasons—he spent all he had in keeping a plain little home comfortable for parents who depended on him.

Both were now dead, but his brother had needed help, having less energy than he had, with worse habits, and a poor little wife who resembled the

"Old woman who lived in a shoe,

And had so many children she didn't know what to do."

Getting this small army off to the West had put him into a corner. Then came the hard times—the shutting down of furnaces and closing of mills.

He had heard of work in Sheffield, and was on his way there on foot. His clothes were good when he started, now they were covered with dust, and his shoes had worn out.

He had slept often in barns, eaten up his small capital, sold his portmanteau in one town where a lodging under a roof was necessary, and parted with all its contents at an old clothes shop.

He had done everything to keep from asking for help, and he was still the respectable man he has always considered him.

Now, in this quiet place, he had asked a pretty little lady, with enough and to spare, to give him some food, and had been refused, threatened with the dog, and called a tramp. His soul burned within him.

The lady went back to her parlour shuddering.

She was quite alone in the house, save for a little maid-servant, who shrieked and ran

away in the face of any threatened danger, such as a mouse in the pantry, or mysterious noises in the cellar; and there had been one or two tragedies in the neighbourhood in which the tramp proper had figured ferociously.

People had given these creatures food, and had been robbed and murdered afterwards; had housed them, and experienced ingratitude of the foulest sort.

That a tiger was loose upon the lawn would not have been more terrible to think of than that a tramp was there. Still, she felt a little uncomfortable.

"If it really was an honest poor person," she thought, "how cruel I have been!"

Then she recalled the fact that the man who murdered the two old ladies in the next village had said he was a shoemaker out of work; and, while Miss Letty was dishing him some soup, and Miss Betty crossing the room with a bowl of tea for him, he had struck them down with the hatchet, and gone off with their little silver, three watches, some money, and poor Miss Letty's engagement ring, never taken from her finger since her lover died upon his bridal eve.

Besides, she had promised her husband not to let any idea of being good to the poor put her into danger of death, or worse, at a tramp's hands.

With all these excuses, Mrs. Carr, having a Christian soul under her fashionable bodice, was still uneasy.

The little maid was busy in the cottage kitchen. It was all bright and comfortable, and now she must drive to the station for her husband.

The man servant had left them a day or two before, and they were going to the city so soon that another had not been hired; but she could harness her horse very well herself, and soon it was done, and the pretty figure in its dress of cream-coloured nun's veiling, with tiny ivory balls in its ears and at its throat, and a dainty hat to match on its black hair, perched itself on the cushions of the little vehicle.

Away they went, gay trap, frisky pony, pretty child and beautiful woman, making such a pretty picture in the twilight that Mrs. Stone, the artistic lady in the next house, called out to her husband,—

"What a Christmas card that would make if we could only get it just as it looks against the sunset!"

Another pair of eyes saw the picture also. The man who had begged for bread and received a stone. He was making his way wearily along toward the railway.

He might reach his destination; he might not.

Perhaps he could live on chestnuts and roadside apples. He would ask for nothing if he starved. No one should call him tramp again, or refuse to give the morsel he never refused a fellow-being in his life.

He was weak with hunger already, but he took his oath to that. And as he swore this Mrs. Howard's carriage rolled past him, covering him with dust from its red wheels; and the little boy, in his gay costume, cried aloud,—

"Mamma, there's that tramp again!"

It was as though he had thrown another stone which wounded him.

Paradise-on-the-Hill has a long carriage drive to the railway station. There is one spot which is very picturesque and beautiful. It is where the carriage road crosses a cut through which the railway runs between natural stone walls. The trains cannot be seen by drivers because of the tall rocks and great trees, until they are just across the aperture.

Everyone is cautious here. Mrs. Howard was particularly so. She drove so slowly down the hill that the man she had called a tramp outwalked her. He reached the cut, looked, believed he saw an express train coming at full speed, and sat down by the roadside. He was not strong enough nor was his head steady enough to risk crossing against time. He sat and waited, and looking up the

drive, saw the pretty picture he had just seen altered to a terrible one.

The shriek of the coming train was a fearful one—a warning note desirable in a region where old residents quietly drove their slow teams before rushing express trains every day, and where an accident to "our esteemed neighbour So-and-so" was one of the regular items of the newspaper in consequence.

But Mrs. Howard a horse bathed himself to be terribly alarmed at the sound, and with a plunge and a cry as alarming in itself as that uttered by the iron monster in the cut, the animal started off at full speed.

The man who watched him knew that he would reach the track just in time to drag the wagon before the engine. He saw the woman holding her child fast and clinging to the light rail which surrounded the seat.

She was paralyzed with terror—powerless to do anything to save herself. Yes, there was the human being who had refused him aid less than an hour before; who had called him a tramp. There was the child who had thrown a stone at him. He had cursed them. His curse had been, "May you need help and get none!" and it had fallen already.

They needed help, and suddenly the demon in his soul fled from it. The angel of pity took its place, and he stood fit for Heaven. They needed help, and he would give it—what help he could. It might be of avail.

"Heaven grant it may!" he prayed; and he sprang forward.

He was in time. He seized the mad horse's bridle. He held it, feeling most sorry that he had not his usual strength.

"Jump while you can!" he shouted. "I cannot hold the creature long!"

Mrs. Howard obeyed. Her foot was light, her action swift, or she had not succeeded. As it was, she tattered and fell as she touched the ground, and got to her feet dizzy and faint, but holding her child's warm little hand safe in hers.

But where was the carriage, where was the horse, where was the man who had saved their lives—the man she would reward with full beaped hands as well as with thanks and blessings—the man she had turned hungry from her door, and who had repaid her ill-doing with such a deed as this—where was he? The whistle shrieked, the cars, backed, slowed, stopped; passengers alighted; her husband was there. His arms were about her, his pale face was covered with tears, as he sobbed—

"You are not hurt, darling? It is a miracle!"

But still her eyes strained themselves to see that shabby figure, dusty and mud-stained, but such a hero to her now—only to say to him,—

"I know you are not a tramp. Forgive me. Let me help you; let me pay a little of my great debt to you."

She could never be happy in this world again unless this were given her. So she stood, her head on her husband's shoulder, waiting until he should come. But the others gathered, slowly, silently, toward one spot, where up from the cut came two men, bearing something between them.

"He is dead!" they said. "The horse threw him before the engine."

A GENTLEMAN while out shooting one day had the good fortune to catch a hare, which he had come upon as it lay asleep. Thinking the animal might amuse some ladies of his acquaintance, he despatched his Irish servant with it safely tied down inside a basket and duly labelled. The curiosity of Pat, however, overcame his discretion on the way. He undid the string that held down the lid, when out popped pussy, and away she flew like lightning across the fields. "Be jabs!" exclaimed Pat, as he scratched his head and looked after the retreating animal, "you may run, but, faith, you don't know where to go, for you've forgot to take the address wid ye!"

FACETIA.

"Did you ever see the prisoner at the bar?" "Oh, yes; that's where I got acquainted with him."

DR. WINKERS: "I hear your friend was shot in the lumbar regions." "No; he was shot in the coal regions."

AUNT MARIA: "What! crying so early, Tommy? Have you been whipped already this morning?" Tommy: "No'm, I just got up."

They were talking about the Atlantic cable. "It reminds me of a good egg," he said. "A good egg?" "Why, yes—being so successfully laid."

He: "And now, dear, since we are safe in the train, why do you seem so sad?" She (pathetically): "We were not even chased. I don't think it was one bit romantic."

JONES: "It seems incredible, but my cook gets up every morning without being waked up." Smith: "What's the cause of it?" "The milkman. She is in love with him."

MISS ARCHDEAL (to Rusticboy): "Yes, dear, I return to the city to-morrow. Alas! we must indeed part! But why do you weep?" Rusticboy: "I am sympathizing with the city fellows."

PROFESSOR: "I regret to say, sir, that you will never make a success as a public speaker." Popil: "Indeed! Why not?" "You enunciate distinctly every word you utter. That defect, sir, is fatal."

JACK: "Charley, why don't you propose to the Widow Green's daughter? She's rich, and is regarded as the pearl of her sex." Charley: "I know it, my boy, but I dislike the mother of pearl."

In a good speech there are two important things. One is the beginning, and the other is the end. The nearer the beginning is to the end, as a general thing, the better and more satisfactory the speech.

FIRST DAME: "Do you ever go through your husband's pockets in the morning?" Second Dame: "Huh! Catch me waiting until morning. I go through them before he goes out in the evening."

A WRITER says that "only a woman understands the higher use of flowers." The writer aforesaid has evidently had his view of the stage obstructed by a female hat garnished with a bouquet a foot high.

MADAMEBELLE BATCHELOR: "Why do they call them fancy balls, Harry?" Brother Harry: "I can't imagine, unless it's because the fellows can talk and dance with any strange girls they fancy." "Take me to this one, Henry."

OUT OF DATE.—Enamoured Swain: "For you, darling, I would lay me down and die." Practical Maiden: "That sort of thing is clear out of date, Willie. What a girl wants nowadays is a man who is willing to get up and hustle for her."

ELEVATOR BOY: "I remember you from the time you were here before, miss." Miss Walk-up: "Why, how is that? I was at this hotel only a week." Elevator Boy: "Yes, miss; but I remember you 'cause you didn't remember me when you left."

When the teacher of a grammar class asked: "What is a kiss?" a young lady candidate for graduation honourably replied: "It is what a young man gives you when he says good-night at the front door." The teacher blushed, and said that wasn't the right answer.

SMITH: "I think Miss De Blank is very rude." Jones: "What causes you to think that? I never thought her so." Smith: "I met her down town this afternoon, and asked her if I might see her home. She said yes, I could see it from the top of the high school building, and that it wasn't necessary to go any further."

"I LOVE you, Emmeline, with all the fervour at my command!" he said, as they strolled through the park. "Yes, George," she replied, "I know it; and yet I would that you told me of your love in some other terms. I have been loved with fervour, oh, so many times, and I do want this match to amount to something!"

LADY OF THE HOUSE: "During the past week you have had three different policemen visiting you. I don't propose to put up with any such conduct." New Cook: "It's not my fault, mum. The bill of fare of this house is so poor that no policeman can stand it more than two days. That's why you see a fresh one here almost every day."

MAGGIE, I am in great trouble. I am engaged to two young men at the same time, and the wedding-day is set for both on the same date. "Well, Lizzie, which is the best?" "I don't know. Henry is a banker's son and Arthur is a reporter." "Well, goodness gracious, be sensible and take Arthur. He can describe the wedding in his paper."

"The literary business," said Jingleash to his son, "is a very nice thing, and I am willing to encourage you all I can to help you in that direction. As for myself, I never wrote anything worth reading." "Pardon me, father, if I disagree with you," said the son, "but I have known you to write some very clever things." "Where?" "In your check-book."

Who saves up for a month for a personal treat, and then shares it with the whole family? Woman. Who turns deadly ill at the sight of blood, yet stands recklessly in its rain in time of war or accident? Woman. Who eats scraps for lunch that noble (!) man may have titbits for dinner? Woman. She is a heroine in danger, a coward when looking under the bed.

YOUNG MAN (somewhat agitated): "I have called, Mr. Means, to ask permission to pay my addresses to your daughter, Miss Ruth." Banker Means: "My daughter Ruth, Mr. Peduncle? Why, she is engaged to Mr. Swackhammer." Young Man (still agitated, but reflecting that all is not yet lost): "Did you think I said Miss Ruth, Mr. Means? I said Miss Gwendolen. The—er—similarity of the names probably caused you to misunderstand me."

"GOODNESS gracious, Amelia!" cried her husband, fishing something out of his inside coat pocket. "Here's a letter you gave me to mail two weeks ago, and I declare if I didn't forget all—!" "You'd forget your head if it wasn't fast," she interrupted, seizing the missive. "This letter was to mother, telling her to postpone her visit this season. I suppose she'll be here to-morrow, now." "Suffering salts!" ejaculated Amelia's husband, sotto voce; "and I forgot to mail that letter purposely, thinking it was an invitation to her mother to make us a visit!"

BAYVILLE VISITOR: "I would like to get you to teach me to sail a boat." Boatman: "Sail a boat? Why, it's easy as swimmin'. Just grasp the main sheet with one hand, an' the tiller with the other, an' if a flaw strikes, ease up or bring 'er to, an' looas the halyards; but look out for the gaff an' boom, or the hull thing'll be in the water, an' ye'll be upset; but if the wind is steady y'r all right, unless y'r too slow in luffin' too; 'cause then y'll be upset sure. Jump right in an' try it; but, remember, whatever ye do, don't jibe!"

"Why did you shoot the man's dog?" asked the justice. "He says he was perfectly quiet and never disturbed any one." "Well, no," the prisoner admitted, "I never heard him howl in his life, but he always looked as though he was going to. He come out into the front yard a dozen times a night, squat down, look at the moon if there was one, draw his breath, open his mouth and fix himself for a howl from there to Jericho, and then change his mind and crawl under the porch and go to sleep. I never heard him howl, but the suspense was killin' me."

SOCIETY.

ESQUADRON on evening gowns are more in evidence than ever.

One of the new Parisian follies is silk socks dyed in the colours of the French flag.

ENAMELLED jewellery, which is now made in great perfection, appears to be as popular as ever.

The fashion of women wearing the single eye-glass has been started in London. It is chiefly affected by theatrical people.

The Queen of Madagascar is a tall, slender woman about twenty-three years old. Her complexion is light and her face sad. Her dresses all come from Paris.

A SET of dessert-d'oyles have been completed for Her Majesty's use, which are intended to commemorate her recent visit to Wales. Each d'oyley bears a highly-finished sketch of some scene in the neighbourhood of Pals, painted on silk.

The King and Queen of Greece have seven children, the youngest a year old. The Princess Alexandra is a very pretty girl of nineteen. The Queen is fond of American literature, takes all the magazines, and adores the works of Hawthorne. All the children speak French, English, Greek and Russian.

It is said that in London luncheon is to take the place of the dinner as a social function, and fashionable people, recurring to the habits of their forefathers, will take their heartiest meal in the middle of the day.

THE Queen, who is very fond of Prussia, Sophie of Prussia, is going to make the young bride-elect some very handsome presents on the occasion of her marriage with the Crown Prince of Greece. The most notable of these will be some lovely diamonds and a perfectly exquisite Dresden china tea service of turquoise blue.

The Queen Regent of Spain and her family were weighed recently at San Sebastian. King Alfonso weighs 35 pounds; his mother, the Queen Regent, 118; his eldest sister, the Princess of the Asturias, 48; the Infanta Maria Theresa, 45. The whole family, therefore, weighs three pounds less than ex-Queen Isabella, who tips the scale at 249.

THE Queen has a large hand, and takes, it is said, seven-and-a-half in gloves. She will wear nothing but black either in hid or soles, and is so unfashionable as to restrict herself to four buttons. She only wears about two dozen in the year, and each pair it is stated costs eight shillings and sixpence, certainly a most preposterous price.

THE latest fad of the New York belle is to have a belt of Hungarian silver, made to encircle her slender waist. In lieu of the usual Greek medallion, she asks each of her admirers to furnish his portrait engraved or cut in bas relief on one of the links. This rage is almost equal in popularity to that of the monogram coin necklace, which was such a craze not long ago. It is very nice for the girls, but somewhat expensive for the young men, and a young woman who has but few admirers would find it a difficult task to collect enough links in the chain to cincture her waist.

THERE will be introduced in Society circles this autumn and winter a new amusement. A number of Chinese lanterns will be distributed around a room in the house, and the young people will select their partners and walk around the room to the tune of a march, which will suddenly stop. They will all then be quickly seated and the young man of the party will arise, and bowing to the young woman, reach his hand to the lantern just above his head. If it contains a piece of paper, on it will be announced the prize she has drawn. If there are thirty-six lanterns there will be nine prizes. Then, when the prizes have been secured, the young woman who has the costliest prize will be expected to accept the company of the man for future parties who has secured it for her.

STATISTICS.

THERE exist at present 3,004 different languages spoken by the inhabitants on our globe, whose religious convictions are divided into 1,000 different creeds.

DURING the fourteen years 1870 to 1883 there were in England and Wales 635 deaths from hydrophobia, with a minimum of 36 in 1870 and a maximum of 82 in 1877.

MORE than 40,000 Jews have, it is believed, been expelled from Russia in the last eighteen months. The Jews receive orders to leave the empire within a fixed time—generally a month—and when the time comes off they must go.

THE total population of the earth is about 1,200,000,000; of which 36,214,000 die yearly, 98,840 daily, 4,020 every hour, and 67 every minute. On the other hand, 36,092,000 are born yearly, 100,800 daily, 4,200 every hour, and 76 every minute.

GEMS.

WHAT we call our despair is often only the painful eagerness of unfulfilled hope.

Gossir has been aptly defined as putting two and two together, and making it five.

He who, meeting a pleasant temptation, stops to shake hands with it, will generally end by going with it wherever it chooses to lead him.

Books, like friends, should be few and well chosen. Like friends, too, we should return to them again and again—for, like true friends, they will never fail us—never cease to instruct—never cloy.

He is the true hero and the true woman with whom the impulses of kindness are most powerful, and by whom the call for help is not unheeded; and they are best fitted for usefulness who do not waste their sympathy in the fruitless pursuit of useless excitement.

SOMETIMES a fog will settle over a vessel's deck, yet leave the topmast clear. Then a sailor goes up aloft and gets a lookout which the helmsman on the deck cannot get. So prayer sends the soul aloft; lifts it above the clouds in which our selfishness and egotism befog us, and gives us a chance to see which way to steer.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

ROASTED OYSTERS.—Take oysters, in the shell, wash the shells clean and lay them on hot coals. When they are done they will open, when the upper shell can be removed. Serve the oysters in the loose shell, with a little melted butter poured over each.

A COOL cellar does not mean a damp cellar. The cellar should be well aired every day, and also given a good whitewashing whenever it is necessary to do so. Every portion of the cellar should be thoroughly cleansed, and if it has a cement floor it should even be well scrubbed.

A NICE DISH FROM A SHEEP'S HEAD.—Bone the head and take out the brains and put them both into strong salt and water for a day or two, changing the water twice a day. Then take the head out of the water and rinse it well, tie it up in a cloth, put it in a saucepan, cover it with cold water, add plenty of sliced vegetables, a bunch of herbs, a few peppercorns, and a little salt. Let the water come to the boil gently, and be careful to remove any scum that may rise to the top, and let the head simmer gently from two and a-half to three hours. When the head is quite tender, take it up, remove the cloth, lay it flat on a dish, season it with mignonette pepper, a little finely-chopped chivalot and parsley. Place another dish on the top with a weight on it, and let it remain until quite cold; then cut it into pieces about two inches long and half an inch wide, dip them in butter, and fry till a nice golden colour.

MISCELLANEOUS.

A SHORT time ago a lady, the first of her sex, graduated in Medicine in Mexico. An appropriate compliment her fellow students of the other sex got up an amateur bull fight in honour of the occasion.

MANY of the London cabmen wear elskins as a preventive of, and remedy for rheumatism. They are worn as garters, anklets, bracelets, and are sometimes used to gird the waist as a cure for lumbago and sciatica.

A TERTOTAL clergyman thinks good work may be done for temperance by photographing drunkards in various stages of drink, drunkards' homes, drunkards' wives, and drunkards' children, and then exhibiting them on the magic-lantern screen.

THERE is a woman in New York who takes contracts for house-cleaning; not the ordinary scrubbing, but she will clean a house from top to bottom, inside and out. She has a host of employes, does her work well, and manages to make a good living.

THE English custom of omitting the article "the" before the names of yachts, especially in the case of yachts named after women, sometimes leads to peculiar statements, such as "Cora proved slow in her stays," "Gracie ran her nose in the mud," and "Alice careened and staggered under her heavy load."

IT is a curious fact that the fine old Seventy-ninth Regiment of Cameron Highlanders, which is stationed at Balmoral during Queen Victoria's residence in Scotland, does not contain a single man in the corps whose name is Cameron. On the other hand, there are no less than three hundred and sixty Macdonalds in the ranks. In order to appreciate the ludicrous side of this state of affairs it should be added that the Highland clans of Cameron and Macdonald have been on terms of bitter enmity for several centuries.

DIFFICULT as is the task of supplying children with satisfactory and euphonious Christian names, I do not imagine that many mothers will care to follow the odd example of the American lady, who has solved the problem by allowing her children to name themselves. Up to the age of twelve, this very original lady, it appears, left her little ones without any name at all, merely distinguishing them by numbers or by nicknames, and when they reached the required age she accepted without demur the names which they themselves selected.

THE opal is supposed to be fatal to love, hence it is never selected as the engagement ring. It sows discord between the giver and the receiver. It is thought to bring storms of passion on the possessor. This was a notion of the ancients, who called the opal carunculus, or the thunder stone. The opal is also regarded as the emblem of hope and is dedicated to the month of October. The moonstone is supposed to have the virtue of making trees fruitful and of curing epilepsy. A writer on the antiquity of gems and the superstitions connected with them says that the adularia, or moonstone, contains in it an image of the moon, representing its various phases during the month.

THE BEST OF IT.—When a cross-questioned witness proves himself more than a match for his legal persecutor, the latter meets with little sympathy. Instead, his discomfiture is blazoned far and near. Sergeant Cooke, had the tables neatly turned upon him on one occasion by a witness whom he was cross-examining in a trial respecting the right of fishing in certain waters. "Dost thou love fish?" was the simple question propounded to the witness; but it elicited a reply which the sergeant very little anticipated from that quarter. "Ay," replied the witness, with a smile, "but I donna like 'cockle' sauce with it!" Dunning was once treated to a similar reply. He was examining a witness, whom he asked if he did not live at the very verge of the court, and received a reply in the affirmative. "And, pray, why have you selected such a spot for your residence?" asked the counsel. "In the vain hope of escaping the rascally impertinence of 'dunning,'" was the unexpected answer.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

—O—

DOLLIE.—It is legal for cousins of any degree to marry.

BETA.—A city is either the present or former seat of a bishopric, or the title has been conferred by a special charter.

ALICE.—Silver can be kept bright for months by being placed in an air-tight case with a good-sized piece of camphor.

H. R.—The ineffectual attempt to hang Lee, the Bab'scombe murderer, took place in Exeter Gaol on February 23, 1888.

MOURNING.—In China grief is associated with a white dress, in Ethiopia with brown, in Turkey with violet, in Egypt with yellow.

D. BRADIE.—There is nothing to hinder any person describing a school as "high school"; it really means a place of advanced education.

MARMADUKE.—You will get all information on the subject by writing or going to the "Emigration Enquiry Office," Broadway, Westminster.

A READER.—If you die without a will your widow will only have one-third of your property; your children will share the remainder among them.

HEARTBROKEN LOVER.—You had better forget all about the young man as soon as possible; it is most likely "out of sight out of mind" with him.

WILLIE'S BRIDE.—It is no longer customary for the clergyman, or guests in general, to kiss the bride, this privilege being reserved for relatives and near friends.

INTERESTED.—The late Fred Archer, the jockey, was married to Miss Nellie Dawson, the daughter of Mr. John Dawson, the Newmarket trainer, January 31, 1888.

GRACE G.—At the dinner-table it was formerly considered the duty of host and hostess to urge their guests to eat. This custom in our own day is entirely abandoned.

CORA.—Lime spots on woollen clothes may be removed by strong vinegar. The vinegar effectually neutralises the lime, but does not injuriously affect the colour of the cloth.

A. FLETCHER.—We never reply to our correspondents through the post; it is against our rules. Nothing but illness will make a naturally ruddy person pale; a pale face is not specially pretty.

L. A.—England has the reputation of being the richest country in the world; but a great many facts and conditions have to be taken into account in making a comparison with other countries.

HANSFRAU.—1. Kerosene will soften boots and shoes when hardened with water and render them pliable. 2. Kerosene will make tea kettles as bright as new; saturate a woollen rag and rub with it.

LADYBIRD.—A shoe should fit as tight as a stocking. But it should be tight round the ankle, across the instep, and round the arch of the foot and heel. It should, however, have a loose upper and a large sole.

HARRY.—The good dictionary word "vamp" was at first a slang word, being rubbing up of old hats and shoes. Now, from being a cobbler's word it has become a classic, and we talk of revamping the language.

H. N.—The bamboo tree does not blossom until it attains its thirtieth year, when it produces seed profusely, and then dies. A famine was prevented in India in 1812 by the sudden flowering of the trees, the seed being gathered for food.

GOING TO SEA.—Dog-watch, on shipboard, is a corruption of "dodge watch"—two short watches, one from four to six, and the other from six to eight, introduced to dodge the routine, or to prevent the same men always keeping watch at the same time.

RATEPAYER.—Any destitute person must be received at the workhouse on application. The Guardians may afterwards proceed against any relatives who may be liable to contribute to the support of the person relieved. Applications for orders of admission should be made at the parish offices.

PURZLED BEN.—There is no reason why a prescription course as well call for common salt and water as for chloride of sodium and oxide of hydrogen. The result would be just as satisfactory, and the patient might be even better off if he intelligently understood what he was taking.

S. B.—The need of sleep is greater in women than in men, the duration of sleep being longer and the percentage of tired morning and evening and of not tired being three to two and two to three respectively as compared to the men. Students sleep longer and are less tired than other men.

SUFFERER.—When the cramp comes on take a long soft cord, wind it around the leg over the place that is cramped, and take an end in each hand and give it a sharp pull, one that will hurt a little. Instantly the cramp will cease, and the sufferer can go to bed assured it will not come on again that night.

FENELLA.—A free application of soft soap to a fresh burn almost instantly removes the fire from the flesh. If the injury is very severe, as soon as the pain ceases, apply linseed oil, and then dust over with fine flour. When this covering is dry, repeat the oil and flour dressing until a good coating is obtained. When the latter dries, allow it to stand until it cracks and falls off, as it will do in a day or two, and a new skin will be found to have formed where the skin was burned.

J. B.—No person endeavouring to cure obesity by a course of diet and the use of certain drugs can foretell exactly the result of the endeavour, and it would be wise for him to remember the possibilities of the peril he may incur. The danger does not come so much from the course of diet as from the drugs.

GRINDER.—Bells are tolled in some of the wine districts of France when there is likely to be a severe frost. The inhabitants at once hurry out of their houses and place quantities of tar between the rows of vines. Then a signal is given to light the tar, and in a few minutes a dense cloud of smoke arises which completely protects the vines from the frost.

WANTS TO KNOW.—The prominence of the scallop in heraldry has been mentioned. It signifies, when found in a coat of arms, or carved upon a mortuary monument, that the person has been a crusader to the Holy Land. In the old days it was known as St. James' or St. Jacob's shell, and was worn by pilgrims and crusaders, sewn to their garments or fastened upon their standards.

JACK (WOOLWICH).—Electricity can be used to impart to wine the good qualities given by age. The simplest plan is to place a quantity of wine in a glass jar, and around the jar to wrap a coil of insulated wire, and then apply a current of electricity. In the course of a few weeks the acid and alcohol will combine in ether and leave the wine, making it smooth and pleasant to the palate.

ENGLISH LAW.—"Mist julep" is a pleasing and refreshing American drink. It is a great favourite in the Southern States, where the ladies will often make it for their guests, who, sitting out on the verandah in the evenings, enjoy the mint-flavoured old Bourbon whiskey. It is merely whiskey, sugar, ice, and a bunch of fresh mint-leaves pressed into a glass, and should be imbibed through a straw.

POOR COOK.—To make mustard sauce take one and a half ounces of butter and the same quantity of flour, and fry them together until a good golden colour. To this add half-a-pint of boiling stock, which should be brown; stir the sauce until it boils, and then add a teaspoonful of French and English mustard and about a teaspoonful of French vinegar and a little cayenne pepper. Strain the sauce and serve it.

WITHIN MY HEART LIES.

Under the soil where the wild grass grows,
Under the leafy trees,
Where the moaning song of the sad wind flows
Like the murmuring of the seas,
There, where my thoughts all end in sighs,
There's where my heart lies.

Where the lifeless leaves rustle and fall,
Wedded to the ground,
Where the night bird's coo is the only call
That breaks the stillness round,
There, where the spirit of darkness flies,
There's where my heart lies.

The wind blows low, for death holds here
Its silent reign supreme,
And never the force of a drifting tear
Can wash away its dream;
And there, in the grave where love ne'er dies,
There's where my heart lies.

J. B.

IGNORANT.—The longest stretch of railroad without a curve is said to be a length of the new Argentine Pacific Railway from Buenos Ayres to the foot of the Andes. For 211 miles this line is without curve or cutting, or embankment deeper than a yard. The plain across which it runs is without timber, and metal sleepers have been used. The line will ultimately cross the Andes, and connect with the Chilean railroads.

CURIOS.—The highest price ever given for any book was paid by the German Government for a book now in its possession at Berlin. The sum of 250,000 francs (£10,000) was paid for it, and the book is a missal, formerly given by Pope Leo X. to King Henry VIII. of England, along with a parchment conferring upon that sovereign the right of assuming the title of "Defender of the Faith," borne ever since by English kings.

B. B. B.—The Roman nose indicates force and strength. As an arch is stronger than a square in architecture, so is the arched nose an indicator of greater strength than a straight one in physiognomy. It means pugnacity, either in the form of self-defence or attack. *Nas retroversus* is French for a turned-up nose, which indicates an inquisitive character, with a strong propensity to pry into the affairs of others. This sign is often conspicuous in great detectives.

LASSIE.—Irish people will tell you that the water potatoes are cooked in should never be allowed to continue boiling, but as soon as it comes to boiling point a little cold water should be poured into the saucepan. This should be repeated three times, after which the water should be strained from the potatoes, and they should be allowed to dry in the saucepan on the side of the stove. A cloth should be placed in the saucepan on the top of the potatoes to absorb any moisture.

LADY CONFESSEUR.—Although shaking hands is apparently a perfectly simultaneous performance, it is the part of the superior to make the first advance, so if you meet a lady of title, or some one much older or more distinguished than yourself, you would be guided by their behaviour to you. A married lady would offer her hand to a single woman, a lady of title to a commoner, and so on. Of course there can be no set rules for things of this kind, but an axiom such as we have just laid down is something to go by.

L. J.—Your question is one which might puzzle any body who was not always mixing in military society. A lieutenant in the army would be introduced as "Mr. A." or "Mr. B."; his envelopes would be addressed "A. B., Esq.," and his name would be written simply "Mr. B." on the top of his invitation card or name card. He would not have his title printed on his visiting card. A lieutenant in the navy is of much higher rank than a lieutenant in the army, and you would use his title in addressing his letters or his name-card, just as you would if he were a captain.

ANXIOUS NED.—The length of time it takes to learn stenography depends on a number of conditions, the most prominent of which are the learner's natural capacity and quickness, his education, his industry, and the amount of time he gives daily to study and practice. If the average person gives an average of three hours per day to study he can learn in eight or ten months enough to enable him to follow ordinary dictation. The more practice he has the better work he will be able to do. Type-writing is not difficult, and can be learned in two or three months by an intelligent and assiduous student.

WORRIED.—The irritation appears to be nettle-rash, which is a nervous affection due to your trouble. If you find it appear after taking any special article of food, such as shell-fish, cheese, or the like, leave off that food. People have idiosyncrasies, and in some cases strawberries, or even mutton, will bring on an attack of nettle-rash. Each person must be a law unto herself in this respect. You will find bathing the part with a little gin and water or carbonate of soda and water give relief. If there is any soreness of the skin, apply an ointment of equal parts of oxide of zinc ointment and boracic ointment mixed.

AN OLD SUBSCRIBER.—Running makes a person warm because of the inhalation of an increased amount of air, causing the blood to pass more rapidly through the lungs. The rapid inhalation of air involves the introduction of a greater quantity of air into the body, which renders the combustion of the blood more rapid, and the blood itself more heated. The quantity of air breathed while running at the rate of six miles an hour is six times that breathed while walking at the rate of one mile an hour. The superfluous heat arising from the exertion of running is disposed of through the skin by means of increased perspiration.

Q. QUICK.—The King of the Netherlands is 72; the King of Denmark, 71; Queen Victoria, 70; the King of Wurtemberg, 66; the Emperor of Brazil, 65; the King of Saxony, 61; the King of Sweden and Norway, 60; the Emperor of Austria, 58; the King of the Belgians, 54; the Shah of Persia, 51; the King of Portugal, 50; the King of Roumania, 50; the Sultan of Turkey, 46; the King of Italy, 45; the Emperor of Russia, 44; the King of the Hellenes, 43; the King of Bavaria, 41; the Emperor of Japan, 37; the King of Siam, 35; the German Emperor, 30; the Emperor of China, 17; the King of Serbia, 15; and the King of Spain, 5.

BEYNETA.—The engagement or invisible locket, as it is also called, is worn from a light neck chain, and falls out of sight underneath the bodice. These lockets are thin, flat, and closed on both sides, and it hardly needs to be told that they contain a miniature, and that the smooth case is engraved or etched with the giver's name and the date of the engagement. The Victoria, a modification of the Queen chain, which has been well received and promises to find increased favour, is short and of light workmanship, with a bar at one end and a ball or charm at the other, the swivel for the watch being on a small drop-chain, while the watch is thrust inside the bodice the same as with the Queen, the bar in the button-hole keeping it from pulling on the chain.

LENA.—A stooping figure and a halting gait, accompanied by the unavoidable weakness of lungs incidental to a narrow chest, may be entirely cured by a very simple and easily performed exercise of raising one's self upon the toes leisurely in a perpendicular position several times daily. To take this exercise properly one must take a perfectly upright position, with the heels together and the toes at an angle of 45 degrees. Then drop the arms by the side, animating and raising the chest to its capacity muscularly, the chin well drawn in, and the crown of the head feeling as if attached to a string suspended from the ceiling above. Slowly rise up on the balls of both feet to the greatest possible height, thereby extending all the muscles of the legs and body; come again into a standing position without swaying the body backward out of the perfect line. Repeat this same exercise, first on one foot, then on the other. It is wonderful what a straightening-out power this exercise has upon round shoulders and crooked backs, and one will be surprised to note how soon the lungs begin to show the effect of such expansive development.

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